This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

B 453121

GURNALL'S CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR

Digitized by Google

GENERAL LIBRARY of the
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PRESENTED BY

Shirley Smith

Sept. 04

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

BV
4500
.G98
1862

Digitized by Google

THE

CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR;

OR, A TREATISE ON

THE SAINTS' WAR WITH THE DEVIL:

WHEREIN A DISCOVERY IS MADE OF THE POLICY, POWER, WICKEDNESS, AND STRATAGEMS, MADE USE OF BY THAT

ENEMY OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

A MAGAZINE OPENED,

FROM WHENCE

THE CHRISTIAN IS FURNISHED WITH SPIRITUAL ARMS FOR THE BATTLE, ASSISTED IN BUCKLING ON HIS ARMOUR, AND TAUGHT THE USE OF HIS WEAPONS, TOGETHER WITH

THE HAPPY ISSUE OF THE WHOLE WAR.

BY

WILLIAM GURNALL, A.M.,

Formerly of Tavenham, Suffolk.

CAREFULLY REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE

REV. JOHN CAMPBELL, D.D.

LONDON: WILLIAM TEGG.

1862.

Digitized by Google

ABERDEEN:
PRINTED BY ARTHUR KING AND COMPANY,
CONCERT COURT, BROAD STREET.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

'FINALLY, MY BRETHREN, BE STRONG IN THE LORD, AND IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT.'—EPH. vi. 10.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Of Christian courage and resolution, wherefore necessary, and how obtained	2
II.	Of the saints' strength, where it lies, and wherefore laid up in God	7
III.	Of acting our faith on the almighty power of God	12
IV.	Of acting our faith on the almighty power of God, as engaged for our help	14
V.	Wherein is answered a grand objection, which some disconsolate souls may raise against the former discourse	21

'PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.'—Ver. 11.

I.	Sheweth that the Christless and graceless soul is a soul without armour, and therein his misery	27
II.	Sheweth that the armour that we use against Satan, must be divine in the institution, such only as God appoints	30
III.	Sheweth that the armour we use for our defence against Satan must not only be divine by institution, but constitution also	33
IV.	Of the entireness of our furniture; it must be the whole armour of God	36
	Of the use of our spiritual armour, or the exercise of grace	40

YE MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE WILES OF THE DEVIL.'—Ver. 11.

	Of Satan's subtlety, to choose out the most advantageous seasons for tempting	46
II.	Satan's subtlety in managing his temptations, where several stratagems used by him to deceive the Christian are laid down	48
III.	Of Satan's subtlety in choosing instruments fit for his turn, to carry on his tempting design	51
IV.	This point of Satan's subtlety, as a tempter to sin, is briefly applied	54
V.	Wherein is shewed the subtlety of Satan, as a troubler and an accuser for sin, where many of his wiles and policies to disquiet the saints' spirits are discovered	56
	A brief application of the second branch of the point, viz., of Satan's subtlety as a troubler and accuser for sin	62
VII.	Containing some directions tending to entrench and fortify the Christian against the assaults and wiles of the Devil, as a troubler	63

134133

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
VIII.	Of the saints' victory over their subtle enemy, and whence it is that creatures so over-matched should be able to stand against Satan's wiles	68
IX.	An account is given, how the all-wise God doth out-wit the devil in his tempting of saints to sin, wherein are laid down the ends Satan propounds, and how he is prevented in all, with the gracious issue that God puts to these his temptations	70
X.	A brief application of the point in two branches	75

'FOR WE WRESTLE NOT AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD,' &c.—Ver. 12.

I.	Sheweth the Christian life here to be a continual wrestling with sin and Satan; and the paucity of those who are true wrestlers, as also how the true wrestlers should manage their combat	77
II.	Wherein is shewed what is meant by flesh and blood, how the Christian doth not, and how he doth, wrestle against the same	84
III.	Wherein is shewn what a principality Satan hath, how he came to be such a prince, and how we may know whether we be under him as our prince or not	89
IV.	Of the great power Satan hath, not only over the elementary and sensitive part of the world, but intellectual also, the souls of men	97
V.	Of the time when, the place where, and the subjects whom Satan rules	103
VI.	Of the spirituality of the devil's nature, and their extreme wickedness	123
VII.	Of Satan's plot to defile the Christian's spirit with heart-sins.—The second point follows	129
VIII.	How Satan labours to corrupt the Christian's mind with error	133
IX.	Of pride of gifts, and how Satan tempts the Christian thereto	135
X.	Of pride of grace	145
XI.	The third kind of spiritual pride, viz., pride of privileges	149
XII.	Sheweth what the prize is which believers wrestle against these principalities, powers, spiritual wickednesses for, in high places	155
XIII.	An exhortation to the pursuit of heaven and heavenly things	159

'WHEREFORE TAKE UNTO YOU THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.'—Ver. 13.

I.	The reason why the apostle renews the same exhortation; and also what truths ministers are often to preach to their people	169
II.	The best of saints subject to decline in their graces, and why we are to endeavour a recovery of decays in grace	169
III.	A cautionary direction from what we may not, as also from what we may judge, our graces to be in a declination	169
IV.	A word of counsel for the recovery of declining grace	169
V.	The words opened, and what is meant by the evil day: 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, having done,' &c.	171
VI.	Sheweth that the day of affliction is evil, and in what respects; as also unavoidable; and why to be prepared for	173
VII.	The application of the point	179
VIII.	The second argument with which the exhortation is pressed, drawn from the assured victory which shall crown the soul's conflict if in this armour, where several points couched in the argument are briefly handled	181

'STAND THEREFORE.'—Ver. 14.

I.	Wherein is briefly shewed the necessity of resisting Satan's temptations, with the danger of yielding to them	191

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
II.	Wherein is shewed, what it is for a Christian to stand in order, together with his duty in this particular, and the danger of stragglers from their own place	198
III.	Wherein is contained the third and last importance of the word 'stand,' and the Christian's duty of standing on his watch spoken to; why he is to watch, and how he should	203
	'HAVING YOUR LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH.'—Ver. 14.	
I.	A brief explication of the words	207
II.	Wherein is shewn, it is the Christian's duty to labour for a judgment established in the truth, with the reasons of it; as also some application of the point	208
III.	Some directions for the establishing the judgment of professors in the truth	213
IV.	Wherein is contained the second way of having our loins girt with truth, viz., so as to make a free and bold profession of it; and why this is our duty; and a short exhortation to it	216
V.	A direction or two for the girding of truth close to us in the profession of it	220
VI.	Of the second kind of truth: truth of heart, or sincerity, with the kinds of it; and in particular, of moral uprightness, together with its deficiency; and a double caution about this; the one to the saints, the other to the morally upright person	226
VII.	Of evangelical or godly sincerity, what it is, and what uncomeliness this girdle covers, as also how it covers them	229
VIII.	An account why sincerity covers the saints' uncomeliness	236
IX.	Of the odious nature of hypocrisy, and hatefulness of it to God	240
X.	Where all are stirred up to put themselves upon the trial, whether sincere or not; three arguments used to provoke to the work; and four false characters, by which the hypocrite flatters himself into a conceit of being upright	246
XI.	The weak grounds whereby tempted souls argue against their own uprightness	250
XII.	Four characters of truth of heart, or sincerity	254
XIII.	A word of direction to those who, upon trial, are found unsound and false-hearted	261
XIV.	An exhortation to those who, upon trial, are found to be true in heart, or sincere, to wear this belt close girt to them in the daily exercises of it; with directions for that purpose	264
XV.	Counsel and comfort to those who are sincere, but drooping, doubting souls, who neither are condemned absolutely in their consciences for hypocrites, nor fully absolved from the suspicion of it in their own thoughts	272
XVI.	Wherein the second reason of the metaphor is opened; why sincerity is set out by the soldier's belt; viz., from the establishing and strengthening nature of this grace, particularly of a preserving strength it hath; with some special reasons wherein the hypocrite falls off	277
XVII.	Of a recovering strength that sincerity hath, and whence	280
XVIII.	Of a supporting and comforting property sincerity hath shewn in several particular instances	282
XIX.	A brief applicatory improvement of the point, both in general and particular branches also	288
	'AND HAVING ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.'—Ver. 14.	
I.	Contains the explication of the words	291
II.	A short point from the connexion of this piece of armour with the first; righteousness with truth	294

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
III.	Wherein the grand point from the word is laid down, that the Christian's especial care should be to keep on his breastplate, *i. e.* maintain the power of holiness in his conversation; with the first reason of the point taken from God; his design as to this	295
IV.	The second reason why the Christian should wear this breastplate of righteousness, and maintain the power of holiness so carefully taken from Satan's great design against it	299
V.	The third reason, taken from the excellency of righteousness and holiness	301
VI.	Contains the first instance, wherein the Christian is to express the power of holiness, and that is in his behaviour towards sin; branched into several particulars	306
VII.	A second instance, wherein the power of holiness is to appear in the Christian's life, *i. e.*, in the duties of God's worship	309
VIII.	A third instance, wherein the power of holiness must appear, and that is in the Christian's worldly employments	312
IX.	Of expressing the power of holiness, in and to our family relations	314
X.	Of exercising the power of holiness in our carriage to our neighbours without doors	318
XI.	Contains nine or ten directions towards the helping those that desire to maintain the power of a holy, righteous conversation	320
XII.	Wherein the first policy or stratagem of Satan is defeated, which he useth to make the Christian throw away his breastplate of righteousness, as that which hinders the pleasure of his life	327
XIII.	Wherein is defeated Satan's second wile, by which he would cheat the Christian of his breastplate, presenting it as prejudical to his worldly profits	331
XIV.	Wherein is defeated the third stratagem Satan useth to disarm the Christian of his breastplate; and that is by scaring him with the contradiction, opposition, and feud, from the world it brings	333
XV.	Contains two uses of the point	335
XVI.	An exhortation to the saints, in three branches	340

'AND YOUR FEET SHOD WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE.' —Ver. 15.

I.	Wherein the gladsome news that the Gospel brings is declared from five particulars, requisite to fill up the joyfulness of a message; with a word to stir up our bowels in pitying those that never heard any of this news	344
II.	A lamentation for the unkind welcome that Gospel news finds in the world, with two or three sad grounds of fear, as to us in this nation; taken from the present entertainment the Gospel hath among us, with a double exhortation to the Saints to rejoice in this joyous message, and chiefly in this	347
III.	A fourfold peace attributed to the Gospel, and in particular, peace of reconciliation, where it is proved there is a quarrel betwixt God and man; as also that the Gospel can only take it up; and why God thus laid the method of man's recovery so	352
IV.	A more particular account why God reconciled sinners to himself by Christ	356
V.	An exhortation to embrace this peace of reconciliation, offered in the Gospel	360
VI.	Four directions by way of counsel to sinners, yet in an unreconciled state, how they may be at peace with God	365

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
VII.	An exhortation to such as are at peace with God, in six particulars	370
VIII.	That peace of conscience is a blessing to be obtained from the Gospel, and only the Gospel, with a double demonstration thereof	373
IX.	A reproof to three sorts of persons that offend against this peace which the Gospel brings	379
X.	Where we have a trial of our peace from four characters of Gospel peace or comfort	384
XI.	That the Gospel alone can unite the hearts of men together in true peace, and how the Gospel doth it	388
XII.	Wherein is shewn the difference between the peace that is among saints, and which is among the wicked, the greatness of their sin, who are ministers of peace, and yet stir up strife, and the reason why there is no more peace and unity among saints in this life	392
XIII.	An exhortation to the saints to maintain peace among themselves, and promote it to their utmost, from three arguments	394
XIV.	The duty of a Christian to stand shod with a heart prepared for all sufferings, with one reason of the point	401
XV.	The second reason of the point taken from the excellency of this frame of spirit	407
XVI.	The number of true Christians but little, shewn from this readiness to suffer, that is required in every Christian, more or less; with an exhortation to the duty, from two arguments	410
XVII.	Six directions for the helping on of this Spiritual shoe	413
XVIII.	Sheweth who is the person that is shod and prepared for sufferings, *i. e.*, he that hath the Gospel's peace in his bosom, and how this peace doth prepare for suffering; with a brief application of all	417

'ABOVE ALL, TAKING THE SHIELD OF FAITH, WHEREBY YE SHALL BE ABLE TO QUENCH THE FIERY DARTS OF THE WICKED.'—Ver. 16.

I.	The explication of the words in a fourfold inquiry	424
II.	Sheweth the pre-eminence of faith above other graces, in four particulars	431
III.	Sheweth unbelief to have the precedency among sins, as faith among graces	439
IV.	Some arguments to make us serious in the trial of our faith, with one direction taken from the manner of the Spirit's working faith	441
V.	Where our faith is put upon trial by its obedience, with some particular characters that faith's obedience is stamped with	446
VI.	Two properties of faith: it is prayerful, and uniform in its acting	449
VII.	An exhortation to all in a state of unbelief, to endeavour for faith, with one direction toward the attaining of it	453
VIII.	Contains a second direction for the obtaining faith	456
IX.	Containing three directions more towards the obtaining faith	458
X.	An exhortation to believers, above all to look to their faith, with some directions for the preserving it	462
XI.	Sheweth, it is the duty of a Christian to own the grace of God in him, and not deny it; with the resolution of some scruples, with which weak saints dispute against the truth of their own faith	470
XII.	The saint's enemy described, with his warlike provision, fiery darts, and what they are	474
XIII.	The fiery nature of Satan's enticing temptations, with faith's power to quench them	478

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
XIV.	How faith quencheth the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eye, and pride of life	479
XV.	Sheweth the difference between faith's conquests over the world by quenching the fiery darts shot from it, and that victory which some of the better heathens attained to; as also a trial of our faith propounded by this power to quench Satan's enticing temptations, more or less	483
XVI.	An objection against believing answered; and some directions how to use this shield to quench enticing temptations	485
XVII.	Of the second sort of temptations, that are more affrighting, and how faith quencheth these darts in particular temptations to Atheism, which is overcome, not by reason, but by faith	488
XVIII.	Of temptations to blasphemy, and how faith quencheth them, and defeats Satan's double design	491
XIX.	The third fiery dart of despair, and the chief argument which Satan urgeth most upon souls, to drive them into it (taken from the greatness of sin), refuted; as also the first answer with which faith furnisheth the soul for this purpose	497
XX.	Faith's second answer to Satan's argument, taken from the greatness of sin, to drive the soul to despair, where faith opposeth the greatness of the promises against the greatness of the soul's sin	504
XXI.	Faith's third answer to Satan's arguments, urging the soul to despair, where faith opposeth the greatness of this one sin of despair, to the greatness of the rest	508

'AND TAKE THE HELMET OF SALVATION.'—Ver. 17.

I.	Wherein the concatenation of graces, in their birth, growth, and decay is set forth	512
II.	Of the nature of hope, why styled hope of salvation, and why compared to a helmet	514
III.	Of the use of hope in the Christian's warfare, and of the high and noble exploits it raiseth the Christian to undertake	517
IV.	Sheweth how hope makes the Christian content with and faithful in the meanest place and lowest employment that God orders for him	522
V.	Sheweth the mighty influence hope hath upon the Christian, to support him in his afflictions; in particular, what help it gives, and how	523
VI.	Wherein is shewn that God stays long before he performs some promises, and that it is hope's office then to keep the Christian in a waiting posture	527
VII.	Sheweth a threefold assurance which hope gives the Christian, and thereby quiets him in waiting for the performance of promises when God stays long	530
VIII.	A trial of what metal our helmet of hope is made	537
IX.	Two duties pressed upon those, who, upon trial, find this grace of hope in them	539
X.	Several instances wherein the Christian should comport with, and live up to his hopes	540
XI.	An exhortation to strengthen hope, pressed from three arguments	544
XII.	Wherein is contained six directions, how the Christian may get hope strengthened	547
XIII.	An objection answered; with two or three reflections useful for our improving experience	553
XIV.	An exhortation to them that want this helmet of hope	556

Digitized by Google

'AND THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, WHICH IS THE WORD OF GOD.' —Ver. 17.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Two notes observed in general from the words, and briefly touched upon	559
II.	What is here meant by the word of God	561
III.	The divinity of the Scripture shewn, and the sufficiency of its own testimony to prove the same	562
IV.	An argument for the Divinity of the Holy Scriptures, drawn from their antiquity and the sincerity of the penmen thereof	563
V.	The Divinity of the Scriptures demonstrated from the prophetic part in it	565
VI.	The Divine extraction of the Scripture evident in its doctrinal part	567
VII.	The Divinity of the Scripture proved from its preceptive part	567
VIII.	The heart-searching property of the Scriptures	570
IX.	The property of the word to awaken and terrify the conscience	571
X.	The comforting property of the word to bleeding consciences	572
XI.	The converting power of the word	573
XII.	Why the word of God is called the sword of the Spirit, and from it the point raised	576
XIII.	Wherein is shewn how the persecutors of God's truth and church are conquered by this sword	577
XIV.	Wherein it is shewn how victorious a sword over the seducer and heretic the word of God is	579
XV.	Our third enemy made up of an army of corruptions and lusts within, and the power of this sword of the Spirit to conquer them	581
XVI.	The fourth and last enemy the Christian engageth, made up of many troops of afflictions, together with his victory over them, obtained by this sword of the word	583
XVII.	The Church of Rome charged of high presumption and great cruelty in disarming the people of this sword of the Scriptures	584
XVIII.	Against the same Church of Rome, for imputing insufficiency to the Scriptures	586
XIX.	Sheweth the great wickedness of those who lift up this sword in defence of any sin	586
XX.	An exhortation to thankfulness for this sword of the word, whereby we are enabled to stand on our defence against our greatest enemies	587
XXI.	An exhortation to the study of the word	590
XXII.	Several carnal shifts and objections that some bring to excuse them from the study of the Scriptures removed	592
XXIII.	Containing four directions to the Christian in the use of this sword for his defence against the first enemy, the persecutor	595
XXIV.	Directions to the Christian how to make use of the sword of the word for his defences against errors and seducers	599
XXV.	Directions how to use this sword for cutting down and conquering the lusts in our own bosoms, and temptations to sin from without	603
XXVI.	Some Scripture answers, fitted to the common arguments of the tempter, with which he usually enticeth to sin, are here brought to the Christian's hand for his defence	607
XXVII.	Two directions more, how to use the word for our defence against temptations to sin	611
XXVIII.	How the Christian may use the sword of the word for his defence in any affliction, and a direction towards it	613
XXIX.	Five directions more upon the same account	616
XXX.	The whole discourse on this piece, shut up with an exhortation to ministers, to whom this sword is especially committed	620

Digitized by Google

'PRAYING ALWAYS WITH ALL PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION IN THE SPIRIT, AND WATCHING THEREUNTO WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE AND SUPPLICATION FOR ALL SAINTS.'—Ver. 18.

CHAP.		PAGE.
I.	Prayer's usefulness and necessity for the saint's defence in his warfare shewn, and one reason given of the point	624
II.	The influence prayer hath on all the graces of a saint, shewn	626
III.	Prayers' prevalency with God, the third reason given	629
IV.	The question answered, Why God requires prayer for that which he hath promised before to give	630
V.	A sharp reproof to all prayerless souls; with the dismal state that such are in, shewn	632
VI.	An exhortation to the saints that they abound in this duty	634
VII.	Two stratagems whereby Satan labours to keep the weak Christian from the duty of prayer	635
VIII.	Satan's policy to keep a soul from this duty, upon a pretence of present indisposition of body	636
IX.	The same upon indisposition of heart	637
X.	The same to start some worldly business, to be dispatched in the hour of prayer repelled	640
XI.	The same, to discourage from it under pretence that the mercies he would beg are too great	641
XII.	The same to interrupt in prayer by wandering thoughts	644
XIII.	Contains the first cause of roving thoughts in prayer	646
XIV.	Contains the second cause of wandering thoughts in prayer	648
XV.	Contains a third cause of wandering thoughts in prayer	649
XVI.	The last cause of wandering thoughts in prayer, and its remedy	650
XVII.	Some consolotary considerations, for the Christian dejected over much for wandering thoughts in prayer	651
XVIII.	Satan's last design upon the saint's prayer, and first impediment, that may obstruct the acceptation of it in heaven	653
XIX.	The second thing that may hinder the same	654
XX.	The third and fourth hindrance to the same	655
XXI.	The fifth cause of the same	657
XXII.	Four rules whereby we may know whether we exercise faith in prayer	659
XXIII.	The Second policy with which Satan labours to defeat the saint, *i. e.*, to whisper false fears into his ear, that his prayer is not heard	661
XXIV.	The saint's arms against Satan's first cavil at his prayers	662
XXV.	A threefold argument which Satan draws from God's deportment to the Christian, in and after prayer, to make him question its acceptance	663
XXVI.	How to know whether a mercy comes to us by common providence, or as a gracious answer to prayer, resolved	668
XXVII.	The first importance of 'praying always,' shewn	669
XXVIII.	The second importance of praying in all conditions	671
XXIX.	The third importance of praying always	673
XXX.	Of ejaculatory prayer, its nature, use, and end	674
XXXI.	A reproof to those that use not this kind of prayer	677
XXXII.	An exhortation to the frequent use of it	678
XXXIII.	Secret prayer is a duty incumbent on us, and why	680
XXXIV.	Wherein is shewn the low stoop of the Divine Majesty in holding communion with a saint in closet prayer	682
XXXV.	An exhortation to the saints to keep up secret prayer	683
XXXVI.	The duty of those that have the charge of a family to set up the worship of God in it	685
XXXVII.	Three objections against it answered	686
XXXVIII.	A reproof to those that unnecessarily throw themselves to live in such families where the worship of God is not set up	688

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
XXXIX.	A word of counsel to those who live in praying families	689
XL.	A word to those who have no worship of God in their houses	690
XLI.	A word to those who perform this duty	691
XLII.	Of public prayer	693
XLIII.	Two questions about it answered	696
XLIV.	Public prayer briefly improved	698
XLV.	Of extraordinary prayer	701
XLVI.	The seasons for extraordinary prayer	703
XLVII.	Why it is to be superadded to ordinary	706
XLVIII.	Directions to the performing it	707
XLIX.	Examination of the end we propound in this duty	709
L.	Directions to be observed in and after the duty	713
LI.	A fourfold similitude to be observed in prayer	716
LII.	A threefold dissimilitude to be made in our requests	718
LIII.	Of deprecatory prayer	720
LIV.	How to deprecate the defiling power of sin	722
LV.	How to deprecate the evil of suffering	725
LVI.	Of imprecatory prayer, and how to be performed	728
LVII.	Of gratulatory prayer	731
LVIII.	Four directions how to frame our thanksgivings	733
LIX.	Four more rules to be observed in the duty	735
LX.	The two last directions in the duty of thanksgiving	737
LXI.	A reproof to the ungrateful world	740
LXII.	An exhortation to thankfulness	741

'IN THE SPIRIT.'—Ver. 18

I.	What it is to pray in the spirit	743
II.	Sheweth, that to pray in the spirit, it is required that we pray with understanding, and why; also what understanding	743
III.	Fervency necessary in order to pray in the spirit	745
IV.	Contains a third reason of the point	747
V.	Some arguments to enkindle our zeal in prayer	748
VI.	Something by way of help, to raise our affections in prayer	750
VII.	Sincerity required to pray with our spirit	751
VIII.	Rules for trial of the sincerity of our hearts in prayer	752
IX.	The acceptable prayer is that which is in the spirit	754
X.	The assistance the Holy Ghost gives a saint in prayer	756
XI.	A reproof to those that make a mock of having the Spirit	757
XII.	An exhortation to those that want the Spirit of grace	759
XIII.	An exhortation to the saints not to grieve the Spirit	761

'AND WATCHING THEREUNTO.'—Ver. 18.

XIV.	The duty of watching, and why it must attend our prayers	762
XV.	Shews wherein the duty of watching in prayer lies	764
XVI.	Wherein the Christian's watch is set for him about prayer	766
XVII.	With all perseverance	769

'AND SUPPLICATION FOR ALL SAINTS.'—Ver. 18.

XVIII.	Of the public spirit that should breath in our prayers for others	777
XIX.	In praying for others, we should principally pray for saints	780
XX.	The application of the point	782
XXI.	Shews that all saints are the subject of our prayers	784
XXII.	The application of the point	785

'AND FOR ME, THAT UTTERANCE MAY BE GIVEN UNTO ME, THAT I MAY OPEN MY MOUTH BOLDLY, TO MAKE KNOWN THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL, FOR WHICH I AM AN AMBASSADOR IN BONDS.'—Ver. 19, 20.

I.	Shews it is a duty to desire the prayers of others, and why	787

Digitized by Google

CHAP.		PAGE
II.	The duty of praying for the ministers of the gospel	791
III.	Shews why the ministers of the gospel chiefly desire prayers	793
IV.	Shews what a mystery is, and in what respects the gospel is so	797
V.	The reason why the gospel is slighted and persecuted	800
VI.	Several duties pressed from the nature of the gospel; and an exhortation to the saints	801
VII.	An exhortation to study this mystery of the gospel	804
VIII.	Shews it is the minister's duty to make known the gospel	807
IX.	An encouragement to faithful ministers	810
X.	Boldness a duty in a minister	811
XI.	The minister's dignity and duty shewn	815
XII.	Why God sends ambassadors; and why he useth men, not angels	819
XIII.	An exhortation to hearken to God's ambassadors	821
XIV.	How ministers should do the duty of ambassadors	823
XV.	Five things touched upon, from Paul's being in bonds	824

Digitized by Google

A TREATISE

OF

THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

INTRODUCTION.

EPHES. VI. 10.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

PAUL was now in bonds, yet not so close kept as to be denied pen and paper; God, it seems, gave him some favour in the sight of his enemies: Paul was Nero's prisoner, but Nero was much more God's. And while God had work for Paul, he found him friends both in court and prison.

Let persecutors send the saints to prison, God can provide a keeper for their turn.

But how doth this great apostle spend his time in prison? Not in publishing invectives against those, though the worst of men, who had laid him in; a piece of zeal which the holy sufferers of those times were little acquainted with: nor in politic councils, how he might wind himself out of his trouble, by sordid flattery of, or sinful compliance with, the great ones of the times. Some would have used any picklock to have opened a passage to their liberty, and not scrupled, so escape they might, whether they got out at the door or window: but this holy man was not so fond of liberty or life, as to purchase them at the least hazard to the gospel. He knew too much of another world, to bid so high for the enjoying of this; and therefore he is fearless what his enemies can do with him, well knowing he was sure of going to heaven whether they would or not. No, the great care which lay upon him, was for the churches of Christ; as a faithful steward he labours to set this house of God in order before his departure. We read of no dispatches sent to court to procure his liberty; but many to the churches to help them to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free. There is no such way to be even with the devil and his instruments, for all their spite against us as by doing what good we can where-ever we are. The devil had as good have let Paul alone, for he no sooner comes into prison but he falls a preaching, at which the gates of Satan's prison fly open, and poor sinners come forth. Happy for Onesimus that Paul was sent to gaol; God had an errand for Paul to do to him and others, which the devil never dreamed of. Nay, he doth not only preach in prison, but, that he may do the devil all the mischief he can, he sends his epistles to the churches, that tasting his spirit in his afflictions, and reading his faith, now ready to be offered up, they might much more be confirmed; amongst which Ephesus was not least in his thoughts, as you may perceive by his abode with them two years together, Acts xix. 10, as also by his sending for the elders of this church as far as Miletus, in his last journey to Jerusalem, Acts xx. 17, to take his farewell of them, as never to see their face in this world more. And surely the sad

Digitized by Google

impression which that heart-breaking departure left upon the spirits of these elders, yea, the whole church by them acquainted with this mournful news, might stir up Paul, now in prison, to write unto this church, that having so much of his spirit, yea of the spirit of the gospel, left in their hands to converse with, they might more patiently take the news of his death.

In the former part of this epistle he soars high in the mysteries of faith. In the latter, according to his usual method, he descends to application; where we find him contracting all those truths, as beams together, in a powerful exhortation, the more to enkindle their hearts, and powerfully persuade them to 'walk worthy of their vocation,' chap. iv. 1, which then is done, when the Christian's life is so far transparent, that the grace of the gospel shines forth in the power of holiness on every side, and from all his relations, as a candle in a crystal glass, not in a dark lanthorn, lightsome one way and dark another; and therefore he runs over the several relations of husband, wife, parents, children, master, and servants, and presseth the same in all these.

Now, having set every one in his proper place, about his particular duty; as a wise general after he hath ranged his army, and drawn them forth into rank and file; he makes this following speech at the head of this Ephesian camp, all in martial phrase, as best suiting the Christian's calling, which is a continued warfare with the world, and the prince of the world. The speech itself contains two parts:

First, A short, but sweet and powerful encouragement, ver. 10.

Secondly, The other part is spent in several directions, for their managing this war the more successfully, with some motives here and there sprinkled among them. To begin with the first:

First, The word of encouragement to battle. With this he begins his speech: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord; the best way indeed to prepare them for the following directions. A soul deeply possessed with fear, and dispirited with strong impressions of danger, is in no posture for council. As we see in an army when put to flight by some sudden alarm, or apprehension of danger, it is hard rallying them into order till the fright occasioned thereby is over; therefore the apostle first raiseth up their spirits, 'Be strong in the Lord:' as if he should say, Perhaps some drooping souls find their hearts fail them, while they see their enemies so strong, and they so weak; so numerous, and they so few; so well appointed, and they so naked and unarmed; so skilful and expert at arms, but they green and raw soldiers: let not these, or any other thoughts dismay you; but with undaunted courage march on, 'and be strong in the Lord,' on whose performance lies the stress of the battle, and not on your skill or strength. It is not the least of a minister's care and skill in dividing the word, so to press the Christian's duty, as not to oppress his spirit with the weight of it, by laying it on the creature's own shoulders, and not on the Lord's strength, as here our apostle teacheth us.

In this verse, First, here is a familiar appellation; 'My brethren.'

Secondly, Here is the exhortation; 'Be strong.'

Thirdly, Here is a cautionary direction annexed to the exhortation; 'In the Lord.'

Fourthly, Here is an encouraging amplification of the direction; 'And in the power of his might,' or in his mighty power.

CHAPTER I.

OF CHRISTIAN COURAGE AND RESOLUTION, WHEREFORE NECESSARY, AND HOW OBTAINED.

We shall waive the appellation, and begin with the exhortation, 'Be strong;' that is, be of good courage, so commonly used in scripture phrase: 2 Chron. xxxii. 7. 'Be strong and courageous.' So Isa. xxxv. 4, 'Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong;' or unite all the powers of your souls, and muster up your whole force, for you will have use of all you can make or get. From whence the point is this.

Doct. The Christian, of all men, needs courage and resolution. Indeed, there is nothing he doth as a Christian, or can do, but is an act of valour. A

Digitized by Google

cowardly spirit is beneath the lowest duty of a Christian: Josh. i. 7, 'Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest'—what? stand in battle against those warlike nations? No, 'but that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee.' It requires more prowess and greatness of spirit to obey God faithfully, than to command an army of men; to be a Christian, than to be a captain. What seems less than for a Christian to pray? yet this cannot be performed aright without a princely spirit; as Jacob is said to behave himself like a prince, when he did but pray; for which he came out of the field God's banneret. Indeed if you call that prayer which a carnal person performs, nothing more poor and dastard-like. Such a one is as great a stranger to this enterprise, as the cowardly soldier is to the exploits of a valiant chieftain. The Christian in prayer comes up close to God, with a humble boldness of faith, and takes hold of him, wrestles with him; yea, will not let him go without a blessing, and all this in the face of his own sins, and divine justice, which let fly upon him from the fiery mouth of the law; while the other's boldness in prayer is but the child, either of ignorance in his mind, or hardness in his heart; whereby not feeling his sins, and not knowing his danger, he rushes upon duty with a blind confidence, which soon fails when conscience awakes, and gives him the alarm that his sins are upon him, as the Philistines on Samson: alas! then in a fright the poor-spirited wretch throws down his weapon, flies the presence of God with guilty Adam, and dares not look him in the face. Indeed, there is no duty in a Christian's whole course of walking with God, or acting for God, but is lined with many difficulties, which shoot like enemies through the hedges at the Christian, whilst he is marching towards heaven: so that he is put to dispute every inch of ground as he goes. They are only a few noble-spirited souls, who dare take heaven by force, that are fit for this calling. For the further proof of this point, see some few pieces of service that every Christian engageth in.

First, The Christian is to proclaim and prosecute an irreconcilable war against his bosom sins; those sins which have lain nearest his heart, must now be trampled under his feet. So David, 'I have kept myself from my iniquity.' Now what courage and resolution doth this require? You think Abraham was tried to purpose, when called to take his 'son, his son Isaac, his only son whom he loved,' Gen. xxii. 2, and offer him up with his own hands, and no other; yet what was that to this? Soul, take thy lust, thy only lust, which is the child of thy dearest love, thy Isaac, the sin which has caused most joy and laughter, from which thou hast promised thyself the greatest return of pleasure or profit; as ever thou lookest to see my face with comfort, lay hands on it, and offer it up: pour out the blood of it before me; run the sacrificing knife of mortification into the very heart of it; and this freely, joyfully, for it is no pleasing sacrifice that is offered with a countenance cast down; and all this now, before thou hast one embrace more from it. Truly this is a hard chapter; flesh and blood cannot bear this saying; our lust will not lie so patiently on the altar, as Isaac, or as a 'lamb that is brought to the slaughter, which is dumb,' but will roar and shriek; yea, even shake and rend the heart with their hideous outcries. Who is able to express the conflicts, the wrestlings, the convulsions of spirit the Christian feels, before he can bring his heart to this work? Or who can fully set forth the art, the rhetorical insinuations, which such a lust will plead with for itself? One while Satan will extenuate and mince the matter:—It is but a little one, O spare it, and thy soul shall live for all that; another while he flatters the soul with the secrecy of it:—Thou mayest keep me and thy credit also; I will not be seen abroad in thy company to shame thee among thy neighbours; shut me up in the most retired room thou hast in thy heart, from the hearing of others, if thou wilt only let me now and then have the wanton embraces of thy thoughts and affections in secret. If that cannot be granted, then Satan will seem only to desire execution may be stayed a while, as Jephtha's daughter of her father; 'Let me alone a month or two, and then do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth,' Judg. xvii. 2, 37; well knowing few such reprieved lusts but at last obtain their full pardon, yea, recover their favour with the soul. Now what resolution doth it require to break through

Digitized by Google

such violence and importunity, and notwithstanding all this to do present execution? Here the valiant sword-men of the world have showed themselves mere cowards, who have come out of the field with victorious banners, and then lived, yea, died slaves to a bare lust at home. As one could say of a great Roman captain, who, as he rode in his triumphant chariot through Rome, had his eye never off a courtezan that walked along the street,—Behold, how this goodly captain, that conquered such potent armies, is himself conquered by one silly woman!

Secondly, The Christian is to walk singularly, not after the world's guise, Rom. xii. 2. We are commanded not to be conformed to this world; that is, not to accommodate ourselves to the corrupt customs of the world. The Christian must not be of such a complying nature, to cut the coat of his profession according to the fashion of the times, or the humour of the company he falls into; like that courtier, who, being asked how he could keep his preferment in such changing times, which one while had a prince *for* popery, another while *against* popery; answered, he was *e salice, non ex quercu ortus:* he was not a stubborn oak, but bending osier, that could yield to the wind. No, the Christian must stand fixed to his principles, and not change his habit; but freely show what countryman he is by his holy constancy in the truth. Now, what an odium, what snares, what dangers doth this singularity expose the Christian to? Some will hoot and mock him, as one in a Spanish fashion would be laughed at in your streets. Thus Michal flouted David. Indeed the world counts the Christian, for his singularity of life, the only fool; which I have thought gave the first occasion to that nick-name whereby men commonly express a silly man or a fool: Such a one, say they, is a mere Abraham; that is, in the world's account, a fool. But why an Abraham? because Abraham did that which carnal reason, the world's idol, laughs at as mere folly; he left a present estate in his father's house, to go he knew not whither, to receive an inheritance he knew not when. And truly such fools all the saints are branded for, by the wise world. 'You know the man and his communication,' said Jehu to his companions, asking what that mad fellow came for, who was no other than a prophet, 2 Kings ix. 11. Now this requires courage to despise the shame, which the Christian must expect to meet with for his singularity. Shame is that which proud nature most disdains: to avoid which, many durst not 'confess Christ openly,' John vii. 13. Many lose heaven, because they are ashamed to go in a fool's coat thither. Again, as some will mock, so others will persecute to death, merely for this nonconformity in the Christian's principles and practices to them. This was the trap laid for the three children; they must dance after Nebuchadnezzar's pipe, or burn. This was the plot laid to ensnare Daniel, who walked so unblamably, that his very enemies gave him this testimony, that he had no fault, but his singularity in his religion, Dan. vi. 5. It is a great honour to a Christian, yea, to religion itself, when all their enemies can say, is, They are precise, and will not do as we do. Now in such a case as this, when the Christian must turn or burn; leave praying, or become a prey to the cruel teeth of bloody men; how many politic retreats and self-preserving distinctions would a cowardly unresolved heart invent! The Christian, that hath so great opposition, had need be well locked into the saddle of his profession, or else he will be soon dismounted.

Thirdly, The Christian must keep on his way to heaven, in the midst of all the scandals that are cast upon the ways of God, by the apostasy and foul falls of false professors. There were ever such in the church, who, by their sad miscarriages in judgment and practice, have laid a stone of offence in the way of profession, at which weak Christians are ready to make a stand, as they at the bloody body of Asahel, 2 Sam. ii. 22, not knowing whether they may venture any further in their profession, seeing such, whose gifts they so much admired, lie before them, wallowing in the blood of their slain profession; of zealous professors to prove, perhaps, fiery persecutors; of strict performers of religious duties, irreligious atheists, no more like the men they were some years past, than the vale of Sodom, now a bog and quagmire, is to what it was when for fruitfulness compared to the garden of the Lord. We had need have a holy resolution to bear up against such discouragements, and not to faint; as Joshua,

Digitized by Google

who lived to see the whole camp of Israel, a very few excepted, revolting, and in their hearts turning back to Egypt, and yet with an undaunted spirit maintained his integrity; yea, resolved, though not a man beside would bear him company, yet he would serve the Lord.

Fourthly, The Christian must trust in a withdrawing God, Isa. l. 10: 'Let him that walks in darkness, and hath no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' This requires a holy boldness of faith, indeed, to venture into God's presence, as Esther into Ahasuerus's, when no smile is to be seen on his face, no golden sceptre of the promise perceived by the soul, as held forth to embolden it to come near, then to press in with this noble resolution, 'If I perish, I perish;' nay, more, to trust not only in a withdrawing, but a 'killing God,' Job xiii. 15; not when his love is hid, but when his wrath breaks forth. Now for a soul to make his approaches to God, by a recumbency of faith, while God seems to fire upon it, and shoot his frowns like envenomed arrows into it; this is hard work, and will try the Christian's metal to purpose. Yet such a masculine spirit we find in that poor woman of Canaan, who takes up the bullets Christ shot at her, and with a humble boldness of faith sends them back again in her prayer.

Fifthly, The believer is to persevere in his Christian course to the end of his life; his work and his life must go off the stage together. This adds weight to every other difficulty of the Christian's calling. We have known many who have gone into the field, and liked the work of a soldier for a battle or two, but soon have had enough, and come running home again; but few can bear it as a constant trade. Many are soon engaged in holy duties, easily persuaded to take up a profession of religion, and as easily persuaded to lay it down; like the new moon, which shines a little in the first part of the night, but is down before half the night be gone; lightsome professors in their youth, whose old age is wrapt up in thick darkness of sin and wickedness. O this persevering is a hard word! this taking up of the cross daily, this praying always, this watching night and day, and never laying aside our clothes and armour; I mean, indulging ourselves to remit and unbend in our holy waiting on God, and walking with God; this sends many sorrowful away from Christ; yet this is the saint's duty, to make religion his every-day work, without any vacation from one end of the year to the other. These few instances are enough to show what need the Christian hath of resolution. The application follows.

Use 1. This gives us then a reason why there are so many professors and so few Christians indeed; so many that run, and so few obtain; so many go into the field against Satan, and so few come out conquerors; because all have a desire to be happy, but few have courage and resolution to grapple with the difficulties that meet them in their way to happiness. All Israel came joyfully out of Egypt under Moses's conduct, yea, and a mixed multitude with them; but when their bellies were a little pinched with hunger, and their greedy desires of a present Canaan deferred; yea, instead of peace and plenty, war and penury; they are ready to fly from their colours, and make a dishonourable retreat into Egypt. Thus the greatest part of those who profess the gospel, when they come to push of pike,—to be tried what they will do, deny, endure for Christ,—grow sick of their enterprise. Alas! their hearts fail them! they like the waters of Bethlehem; but if they must dispute their passage with so many enemies, they will even content themselves with their own cistern, and leave heaven to others that will venture more for it. O, how many part with Christ at this cross-way! like Orpah, that go a furlong or two with Christ, while he goes to take them off from their worldly hopes, and bids them prepare for hardship, and then they fairly kiss and leave him; loath indeed to lose heaven, but more loath to buy it at so dear a rate. Like some green-heads that childishly make choice of some sweet trade, from a liquorish tooth they have to the sweetmeats it affords; but meeting with sour sauce of labour and toil that goes with them, they give in, and are weary of their service, the sweet bait of religion hath drawn many to nibble at it, who are offended with the hard service it calls to; it requires another spirit than the world can give or receive to follow Christ fully.

Use 2. Let us then exhort you, Christians, to labour for this holy resolution,

Digitized by Google

and prowess, which is so needful for your Christian profession, that without it you cannot be what you profess. The fearful are in the forlorn of those that march for hell, Rev. xxi. The violent and valiant are they which take heaven by force; cowards never won heaven. Say not, thou hast royal blood running in thy veins, and art begotten of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by this heroic spirit, to dare to be holy in spite of men and devils. The eagle tries her young ones by the sun; Christ tries his children by their courage, that dare look on the face of death and danger for his sake, Mark viii. 34, 35. O how uncomely a sight is it, a bold sinner, and a fearful saint! one resolved to be wicked, and a Christian wavering in his holy course; to see guilt put innocency to flight, and hell keep the field, impudently braving it with displayed banners of open profaneness, and saints to hide their colours for shame, or run from them for fear, who should rather wrap themselves in them, and die upon the place, than thus betray the glorious name of God, which is called upon by them to the scorn of the uncircumcised. Take heart, therefore, O ye saints, and be strong; your cause is good; God himself espouseth your quarrel, who hath appointed you his own Son, general of the field, called 'the Captain of our salvation,' Heb. ii. He shall lead you on with courage, and bring you off with honour. He lived and died for you; he will live and die with you; for mercy and tenderness to his soldiers, none like him. Trajan, it is said, rent his clothes to bind up his soldiers' wounds; Christ poured out his blood as balm to heal his saints' wounds; tears off his flesh to bind them up. For prowess, none to compare with him; he never turned his head from danger, no, not when hell's malice and heaven's justice appeared in the field against him; 'knowing all that should come upon him, he went forth, and said, Whom seek ye?' John xviii. 4. For success, insuperable; he never lost battle, even when he lost his life; he won the field, carrying the spoils thereof in the triumphant chariot of his ascension to heaven with him, where he makes an open show of them, to the unspeakable joy of saints and angels. You march in the midst of gallant spirits; your fellow-soldiers, every one the son of a Prince. Behold some, enduring with you here below a great fight of afflictions and temptations, take heaven by storm and force. Others you may see after many assaults, repulses, and rallyings of their faith and patience, got upon the walls of heaven, conquerors, from whence they do, as it were, look down and call you their fellow-brethren on earth, to march up the hill after them, crying aloud, Fall on, and the city is your own, as now it is ours, who for a few days' conflict are now crowned with heaven's glory, one moment's enjoyment of which hath dried up all our tears, healed all our wounds, and made us forget the sharpness of the fight with the joy of our present victory. In a word, Christians, God and angels are spectators, observing how you quit yourselves like children of the Most High. Every exploit your faith doth against sin and Satan, causeth a shout in heaven, while you valiantly prostrate this temptation, scale that difficulty, regain the other ground you even now lost, out of your enemies' hands. Your dear Saviour, who stands by with a reserve for your relief at a pinch, his very heart leaps within him for joy, to see the proof of your love to him, and zeal for him in all your combats, and will not forget all the faithful service you have done in his wars on earth; but when thou comest out of the field, will receive thee with the like joy as he was entertained himself, at his return to heaven, of his Father. Now, Christian, if thou meanest thus courageously to bear up against all opposition, in thy march to heaven as thou shouldest do well to raise thy spirit with such generous and soul-ennobling thoughts, so in an especial manner look thy principles be well fixed, or else thy heart will be unstable; and an unstable heart is weak as water, it cannot excel in courage. Two things are required to fix our principles.

First, An established judgment in the truth of God. He that knows not well what or whom he fights for, may soon be persuaded to change his side, or at least stand neuter. Such may be found that go for professors, that can hardly give an account what they hope for, or whom they hope in; yet Christians they must be thought, though they run before they know their errand; or if they have some principles they go upon, they are so unsettled that every wind blows them down, like loose tiles from the house top. Blind zeal is soon put to a shameful

Digitized by Google

retreat, while holy resolution, built on fast principles, lifts up its head like a rock in the midst of the waves. 'Those that know their God shall be strong and do exploits.' Dan xi. 32. The angel told Daniel who were the men that would stand to their tackling, and bear up for God in that hour, both of temptation and persecution, which should be brought upon them by Antiochus; not all the Jews, some of them should be corrupted basely by flatteries, others scared by threats out of their profession; only a few of fixed principles, who knew their God whom they served, and were grounded in their religion, these should be strong and do exploits; that is, to flatteries they should be incorruptable, and to power and force unconquerable.

Secondly, A sincere aim at the right end in our profession. Let a man be never so knowing in the things of Christ, if his aim be not right in his profession, that man's principles will hang very loose; he will not venture much, or far for Christ, no more, no further than he can save his own stake. A hypocrite may shew some mettle at hand, some courage for a moment in conquering some difficulties, but he will shew himself a jade at length. He that hath a false end in his profession, will soon come to an end of his profession, when he is pinched on that toe where his corn is; I mean, called to deny that his naughty heart aimed at all this while; now his heart fails him, he can go no further. O take heed of this wistful eye to our profit, pleasure, honour, or any thing beneath Christ and heaven; for they will take away your heart, as the prophet saith of wine and women; that is, our love; and if our love be taken away, there will be little courage left for Christ. How courageous was Jehu at first! and he tells the world it is zeal for God. But why doth his heart fail him then before half his work be done? His heart was never right set; that very thing that stirred up his zeal at first, at last quenched it, and that was his ambition; his desire of a kingdom made him zealous against Ahab's house, to cut them off, who might in time jostle him beside the throne, which done, and he quietly settled, he dare not go thorough-stitch with God's work, lest he should lose what he had got, by provoking the people with a thorough reformation. Like some soldiers, when once they meet with a rich booty at the sacking of some town, are spoiled for fighting ever after.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE SAINTS' STRENGTH, WHERE IT LIES, AND WHEREFORE LAID UP IN GOD.

THE second branch of the words followeth, which contains a cautionary direction. Having exhorted the saints' at Ephesus, and in them all believers, to a holy resolution and courage in their warfare, lest this should be mistaken, and beget in them an opinion of their own strength for the battle, the apostle leads them out of themselves for this strength, even to the Lord; 'Be strong in the Lord.' From whence observe,

Doct. That the Christian's strength lies in the Lord, not in himself. The strength of the general in other hosts lies in his troops; he flies, as a great commander once said to his soldiers, upon their wings; if their feathers be clipped, their power broken, he is lost. But in the army of saints, the strength of every saints, yea, of the whole host of saints, lies in the Lord of hosts. God can overcome his enemies without their hands, but they cannot so much as defend themselves without his arm. 2. It is one of God's names, 'The strength of Israel,' 1 Sam. xv. 19. He was the strength of David's heart; 'without him this valiant worthy (that could, when held up in his arms, defy him that defied a whole army), behaves himself strangely for fear at a word or two that dropped from the Philistine's mouth. He is the strength of his hands; 'He taught his fingers to fight,' and so is the strength of all his saints in this war against sin and Satan. Some propound a question, whether there be a sin committed in the world in which Satan hath no part? But if the question were, whether there be any holy action performed without the special assistance of God concurring? that is resolved, John xv. 5: 'without me you can do nothing.' Thinking strength of God, 2 Cor. iii. 5, 'Not that we are sufficient as of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.' We apostles, we saints, that have habitual grace, yet this lies like water at the

Digitized by Google

bottom of a well, which will not ascend with all our pumping, till God pour in his exciting grace, and then it comes. To will is more than to think; to exert our will into action, more than both; these are of God, Phil. ii. 13: 'It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure.' He makes the heart new, and having made it for heavenly motion, setting every wheel, as it were, in its right place, then he winds it up by his actuating grace, and sets it on going, the thoughts to stir, the will to move, and make towards the holy object presented; yet here the chariot is set, and cannot ascend the hill of action till God puts his shoulder to the wheel. 'To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not,' Rom. vii. God is at the bottom of the ladder, and at the top also, the author and finisher; yea, helping and lifting the soul at every round in his ascent to any holy action. Well, now the Christian is set on work; how long will he keep close to it? Alas, poor soul, no longer than he is held up by the same hand that empowered him at first! He hath soon wrought out the strength received, and therefore to maintain the tenure of a holy course, there must be renewing strength from heaven every moment; which David knew, and therefore when his heart was in as holy a frame as ever he felt it, and his people by their freewill offering declared the same, yet even then he prays that God would 'keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of his people, and establish their hearts to him,' 1 Chron. xxix. 18. He adored the mercy that made them willing, and then he implores his further grace to strengthen them, and tie a knot, that these precious pearls, newly strung on their hearts, might not slip off. The Christian, when fullest of Divine communications, is but a glass without a foot; he cannot stand, or hold what he hath received, any longer than God holds him in his strong hand. Therefore Christ, when bound for heaven, and ready to take his leave of his children, bespeaks his Father's care of them in his absence, John xvii: 'Father, keep them, as if he had said, they must not be left alone; they are poor, shiftless, children, and can neither stand nor go without help; they will lose the grace I have given them, and fall into those temptations which I kept them from while I was with them, if they be out of thine eye or arms but one moment; and therefore, 'Father keep them.'

Again: consider the Christian as adressing himself to any duty of God's worship still his strength is in the Lord; would he pray? where will he find matter for his prayer? Alas! 'he knows not what to pray for as he ought.' Rom. viii. Let him alone, and he would soon pray himself into some temptation or other, and cry for that which were cruelty in God to give; and therefore God puts words in our mouths: 'Take words with you and say,' Hos. xiv. 2 Well, now he hath put words into his mouth, alas! they will freeze in his very lips, if he hath not some heart-heating affections to thaw the tap. And where shall this fire be had? Not a spark to be found on his own hearth, except it be some strange fire of natural desires which will not serve. Whence then must the fire come to thaw the iciness of the heart but from heaven? The Spirit, he must stretch himself upon the soul, as the prophet on the child, and then the soul will come to some kindly warmth and heavenly heat in his affections; the Spirit must groan, and then the soul will groan; he helps us to these sighs and groans, which turn the sail of prayer; he dissolves the heart, and then it bursts out of the heart by groans of the lips, by heavenly rhetoric; out of the eyes as from a floodgate, with tears; yet further, now the creature is enabled to wrestle with God in prayer, what will he get by all this? Suppose he be weak in grace, is he able to pray himself strong, or corruption weak? No, this is not to be found in prayer as an act of the creature. This drops from heaven also, Psa. cxxxviii. 2: 'In the day that I cried, thou answerest me, and gavest me strength in my soul.' David received it in duty, but had it not from his duty, but from his God. He did not pray himself strong, but God strengthened him in his prayer. Well, cast your eye once more upon the Christian, as engaging in another ordinance of hearing the word preached. The soul's strength to hear the word is from God: 'he opens the heart to attend,' Acts xiv. 14. Yea, he opens the understanding of the saint to receive the word, so as to conceive what it meant. It is like Samson's riddle, which we cannot unfold without his heifer; he opens the womb of the soul to conceive by it, as the understanding

Digitized by Google

to conceive of it, that the barren soul becomes a joyful mother of children. David sat for half a year under the public lectures of the law, and the womb of his heart shut up, till Nathan comes, and God with him; and now is the time of life: he conceives presently, yea, and brings forth in the same day; falls presently into the bitter pangs of sorrow for his sins, which went not over till he had cast them forth in that sweet Psalm li. Why should this one word work more than all the former, but that God now struck in with his word, which he did not before? He is therefore said 'to teach his people to profit,' Isa. xlviii. 17. He sits in heaven that teacheth hearts. When God's Spirit, who is the head master, shall call a soul from his usher to himself, and say, Soul, you have not gone the way to thrive by hearing the word; thus and thus conceive of such a truth, improve such a promise; presently the eyes of his understanding open, and his heart burns within him while he speaks to him. Thus you see the truth of this point, that the Christian's strength is in the Lord. Now we shall give some demonstrations.

SECTION I.—*Reas.* 1. The first reason may be taken from the nature of the saints and their grace; both are creatures, they and their grace also; now *inesse est deesse creaturæ*. It is in the very nature of the creature to depend on God its Maker, both for being and operation. Can you conceive an accident to be out of its subject? whiteness out of the wall, or some other subject? It is as impossible that the creature should be, or act without strength from God; this, to be, act in and of himself, is so incommunicable a property of the Deity, that he cannot impart it to his creature: 'God is, and there is none besides him;' when God made the world, it is said, indeed that he ended his work, that is, of creation. He made no new species and kinds of creatures more, but to this day he hath not ended his work of providence: 'Hitherto my Father worketh,' saith Christ, John v. 17; that is, in preserving and empowering what he hath made with strength to be and act, and therefore he is said to hold our souls in life. Works of art, which man makes, when finished, may stand some time without the workman's help, as the house, when the carpenter that made it is dead; but God's works of nature and grace are never off his hand; and therefore, as the Father is said to work hitherto for the preservation of the works of nature, so the Son, to whom is committed the work of redemption, he tells us he worketh also. Neither ended he his work, when he rose again, any other way than his Father did in the work of creation. God made an end of making, so Christ made an end of purchasing mercy, grace, and glory for believers, by once dying; and as God rested at the end of the creation, so he, when he had wrought eternal redemption, and 'by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,' Heb. i. 3. But he ceaseth not to work by his intercession with God for us, and by his Spirit in us for God, whereby he upholds his saints, their graces, and comforts in life, without which they would run to ruin. Thus we see, as grace is a creature, the Christian depends on God for his strength. But further,

Secondly, The Christian's grace is not only a creature, but a weak creature, conflicting with enemies stronger than itself, and therefore cannot keep the field without an auxiliary strength from heaven. The weakest goes to the wall if no succour comes in. Grace in this life is but weak, like a king in the cradle, which gives advantage to Satan to carry on his plots more strongly, to the disturbance of this young king's reign in the soul; yea, he would soon make an end of the war in the ruin of the believer's grace, did not Heaven take the Christian into protection. It is true, indeed, grace, wherever it is, hath a principle in itself that makes it desire and endeavour to preserve itself according to its strength; but being overpowered, must perish, except assisted by God, as fire in green wood (which deadens and damps the parts kindled) will in time go out, except blown up, or more fire put to that little; so will grace in the heart. God brings his grace into the heart by conquest: now, as in a conquered city, though some yield and become true subjects to the conqueror, yet others plot how they may shake off this yoke; and therefore it requires the same power to keep, as it did to win it at first. The Christian hath an unregenerate part, that is discontented at this new change in the heart, and disdains as much to come under the sweet government of Christ's sceptre, as the Sodomites that Lot should

Digitized by Google

judge them. What, this fellow, a stranger, control us! And Satan heads this mutinous rout against the Christian: so that if God did not continually reinforce this his new planted colony in the heart, the very natives (I mean corruptions) that are left would come out of their dens and holes where they lie lurking, and eat up the little grace the holiest on earth hath; it would be as bread to these devourers.

3. A third demonstration may be taken from the grand design which God propounds to himself in the saint's salvation; yea, in the transaction of it from first to last; and that is twofold.

First, God would bring his saints to heaven in such a way, as might be most expressive of his love and mercy to them.

Secondly, He would so express his love and mercy to them, as might rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory possible: now how becoming this is to both, that saints should have all their ability for every step they take in the way to heaven, will soon appear.

1. This way of communicating strength to saints gives a double accent to God's love and mercy.

First, it distils a sweetness into all that the believer hath or doth, when he finds any comfort in his bosom, any enlargement of heart to duty, any support under temptations: to consider whence come all these, what friend sends them in. They come not from my own cistern, or any creatures: O it is my God that hath been here, and left this sweet perfume of comfort behind him in my bosom; my God, that hath, unawares to me, filled my sails with the gales of his Spirit, and brought me off the flats of my own deadness, where I lay aground. O it is his sweet Spirit that held my head, stayed my heart in such an affliction and temptation, or else I had gone away in a fainting fit of unbelief. How can this but endear God to a gracious soul? His succours coming so immediately from heaven, which would be lost, if the Christian had any strength to help himself (though his stock of strength came at first from God). Which, think you, speaks more love and condescension, for a prince to give a pension to a favourite, on which he may live by his own care; or for this prince to take the chief care upon himself, and come from day to day to this man's house, and look into his cupboard, and see what provison he hath, what expense he is at, and so constantly to provide for the man from time to time? Possibly some proud spirit, that likes to be his own man, or loves his means better than his prince, would prefer the former; but one that is ambitious to have the heart and love of his prince would be ravished with the latter. Thus God doth with his saints; the great God comes and looks into their cupboard, and sees how they are laid in, and sends in accordingly as he finds them. Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things, and you shall have them. He knows you need strength to pray, hear, suffer for him, and *in ipsâ horâ dabitur*.

Secondly, This way of God's dealing with his saints adds to the fullness and stability of their strength. Were the stock in our own hands, we should soon prove broken merchants. God knows we are but leaking vessels; when fullest, we could not hold it long; and therefore, to make all sure, he set us under the streamings forth of his strength; and a leaking vessel under a cock, gets what it loseth. Thus we have our leakage supplied continually. This was the provision God made for Israel in the wilderness; he clave the rock, and the rock followed them. They had not only a draught at present, but it ran in a stream after them; so that you hear no more of their complaints for water: this rock was Christ. Every believer hath Christ at his back, following him with strength as he goes, for every condition and trial. One flower with the root is worth many in a posy, which though sweet, yet do not grow, but wither as we wear them in our bosoms. God's strength, as the root, keeps our grace lively, without which, though as orient as Adam's was, it would die.

2. The second design God hath in his saints' happiness is, that he may so express his mercy and love to them, as may rebound back to him in the highest advance of his own glory therein, Eph. i. 4, 12; which is fully attained in his way of empowering saints, by a strength not of their own, but of their God's sending, as they are put in expense. Had God given his saints a stock of grace to have set up with, and left them to the improvement of it, he had been

Digitized by Google

magnified indeed, because it was more than God did owe the creature; but he had not been glorified as now, when not only the Christian's first strength to close with Christ is from God; but he is beholden still to God for the exercise of that strength, in every action of his Christian course. As a child that travels in his father's company, all is paid for, but his father carries the purse, not himself; so the Christian's shot is discharged in every condition, but he cannot say, This I did, or that I suffered; but, God wrought all in me, and for me. The very comb of pride is cut here, no room for any self-exalting thoughts. The Christian cannot say, That I am a saint is mercy; but being a saint, that my faith is strong, this is the child of my own care and watchfulness. Alas, poor Christian! Who kept thine eye walking, and stirred up thy care? Was not this the offspring of God as well as thy faith at first? No saint shall say of heaven when he comes there, This is heaven, which I have built by the power of my might. No, 'Jerusalem above is a city, whose builder and maker is God!' Every grace, yea, degree of grace, is a stone in that building, the top-stone whereof is laid in glory, where saints shall more plainly see, how God was not only founder to begin, but benefactor also to finish the same. The glory of the work shall not be crumbed, and piece-mealed out, some to God, and some to creature; but all entirely paid in to God, and he acknowledged all in all.

SECTION II.—*Use* 1. Is the Christian's strength in the Lord, not in himself? Surely, then, the Christless person must needs be a poor impotent creature, void of all strength and ability of doing anything of itself towards its own salvation. If the ship, launched, rigged, and with her sails spread, cannot stir till the wind comes fair, and fills them, much less can the timber that lies in the carpenter's yard hew and frame itself into a ship. If the living tree cannot grow, except the root communicates its sap, much less can a dead rotten stake in the hedge, which has no root, live on its own accord. In a word, if a Christian, that hath his spiritual life of grace cannot exercise this life without strength from above; then surely, one void of this new life, dead in sins and trespasses can never be able to beget this in himself, or concur to the production of it. The state of unregeneracy is a state of impotency; 'when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly,' Rom. v. 6. And as Christ found the lump of mankind covered with the ruins of their lapsed estate, (no more able to raise themselves from under the weight of God's wrath, which lay upon them, than one buried under the rubbish of a fallen house, is to free himself of that weight without help,) so the Spirit finds sinners in as helpless a condition, as unable to repent, or believe on Christ for salvation, as they were of themselves to purchase it. Confounded therefore for ever be the language of those sons of pride, who cry up the power of nature, as if man, with his own brick and slime of natural abilities, were able to rear up such a building, whose top may reach heaven itself. 'It is not of him that willeth or runneth, but God that sheweth mercy,' Rom. ix. 16. God himself hath scattered such Babel-builders in the imaginations of their hearts, who raiseth this spiritual temple in the souls of men, not by might, nor by a power of their own, but by his Spirit; that so grace, grace, might be proclaimed before it for ever. And therefore if any, yet in their natural estate, would become wise to salvation, let them first become fools in their own eyes, and renounce their carnal wisdom, which perceives not the things of God; and beg wisdom of God, who giveth, and upbraideth not. If any man would have strength to believe, let them become weak, and die to their own; for 'by strength shall no man prevail,' 1 Sam. ii. 9.

Use 2. Secondly, Doth the Christian's strength lie in God, not in himself? This may for ever keep the Christian humble, when most enlarged in duty, most assisted in his Christian course. Remember, Christian, when thou hast thy best suit on, who made it, who paid for it: thy grace, thy comfort, is neither the work of thy own hands, nor the price of thy own desert; be not for shame proud of another's cost. That assistance will not long stay, which becomes a nurse to thy pride; thou art not Lord of that assistance thou hast. Thy Father is wise, who, when he alloweth thee most for thy spiritual maintenance, even then keeps the law in his own hands, and can soon curb thee, if thou growest wanton

Digitized by Google

with his grace. Walk humbly, therefore, before thy God, and husband well that strength thou hast, remembering that it is borrowed strength. *Nemo prodiget quod mendicat.* Who will waste what he begs? or who will give that beggar that spends idly his alms? When thou hast most, thou canst not be long from thy God's door. And how canst thou look him in the face for more, who hast embezzled what thou hast received?

CHAPTER III.

OF ACTING OUR FAITH ON THE ALMIGHTY POWER OF GOD.

THE third branch followeth, which contains an encouraging amplification annexed to the exhortation, in these words; 'And in the power of his might;' where a twofold inquiry is requisite for the explication of the phrase. First, What these words import, 'The power of his might?' Secondly, What it is to 'be strong in the power of his might?'

For the first,—'The power of his might.' It is an Hebraism, and imports nothing but his mighty power; like that phrase, Eph. i. 6, 'To the praise of the glory of his grace;' that is, to the praise of his glorious grace. And his mighty power imports no less than his almighty power; sometimes the Lord is styled 'mighty and strong,' as Ps. xxiv. 8; sometimes most mighty; sometimes Almighty: no less is meant in all than God's infinite almighty power.

For the second, To be strong in the mighty power, or power of the Lord's might, implies these two acts of faith:

First, A settled firm persuasion, that the Lord is almighty in power. 'Be strong in the power of his might;' that is, be strongly rooted in your faith, concerning this one foundation truth, that God is almighty.

Secondly, It implies a further act of faith, not only to believe that God is almighty, but also that this almighty power of God is engaged for its defence so as to bear up in the midst of all trials and temptations undauntedly, leaning on the arm of God Almighty, as if it were his own strength; for that is the apostle's drift, as to beat us off from leaning on our own strength, so to encourage the Christian to make use of God's almighty power as freely as if it were his own whenever assaulted by Satan in any kind. As a man, set upon by a thief, stirs up all the force and strength he hath in his whole body to defend himself, and offend his adversary; so the apostle bids the Christian 'be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;' that is, Soul, away to thy God, whose mighty power is all intended and devoted by God himself for thy succour and defence. Go, strengthen and entrench thyself in it by a stedfast faith, as that which shall be laid out to the utmost for thy good. From whence these two notes, I conceive, will draw out the fatness of the words.

1. That it should be the Christian's great care and endeavour, in all temptations and trials, to strengthen his faith on the almighty power of God.

2. The Christian's duty and care is not only to believe that God is almighty; but strongly by faith to rest on this almighty power of God, as engaged for his help and succour, in all his trials and temptations.

Doct. First, It should be the Christian's great care, in all temptations and trials, to strengthen his faith on the almighty power of God. When God holds forth himself as an object of the soul's trust and confidence in any great strait or undertaking; commonly this attribute of his almighty power is presented in the promise, as the surest holdfast for faith to lay hold on; as a father in a rugged way gives his child his arm to lay hold by, so doth God usually reach forth his almighty power for his saints to exercise their faith on. Abraham Isaac, and Jacob, whose faith God tried above most of his saints before or since, for not one of those great things which were promised to them, did they live to see performed in their days; and how doth God make known himself to them for their support, but by displaying this attribute? Exod. vi. 3: 'I appeared unto Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty.' This was all they had to keep house with all their days; with which they lived comfortably, and died triumphantly, bequeathing the promise to their children, not doubting (because God Almighty had promised) of the performance. Thus Isa. xxvi., where great mercies are promised to Judah, and a song penned beforehand, to be sung on that joyous day of their salvation; yet because there was a sharp

Digitized by Google

winter of captivity to come between the promise and the spring-time of the promise; therefore, to keep their faith alive in this space, the prophet calls them up to act their faith on God Almighty (verse 4): 'Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.' So when his saints are going into the furnace of persecution, what now doth he direct their faith to carry to prison, to stake with them, but his almighty power? 1 Pet. iv. 19: 'Let them that suffer, commit the keeping of their souls to him, as to a faithful Creator.' Creator is a name of almighty power. We shall now give some reasons of the point.

Reas. 1. First, Because it is no easy work to make use of this truth, how plain and clear soever it now appears, in great plunges of temptation, that God is almighty; to vindicate this name of God from these evil reports which Satan and carnal reason raise against it requires a strong faith indeed. I confess this principle is a piece of natural divinity: that light which finds out a Deity, will evince, if followed close, this God to be almighty; yet in a carnal heart, it is like a rusty sword, hardly drawn out of the scabbard, and so of little or no use. Such truths are so imprisoned in natural conscience, that they seldom get a fair hearing in the sinner's bosom, till God gives them a gaol-delivery, and brings them out of their house of bondage, where they are shut up in unrighteousness, with a high hand of his convincing Spirit. Then, and not till then, the soul will believe God is holy, merciful, almighty; nay, some of God's peculiar people, and not the meanest for grace amongst them, have had their faith for a time set in this slough, much ado to get over those difficulties and improbabilities, which sense and reason have objected, so as to rely on the Almighty power of God with a notwithstanding. Moses himself, a star of the first magnitude for grace; yet see how his faith blinks and twinkles, till he wades out of the temptation. Numb. xi. 21: 'The people amongst whom I am, are six hundred thousand, and thou hast said, I will give them flesh that they may eat a whole month; shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them?' This holy man had lost the sight, for a time, of the almighty power of God: and now he is projecting how this should be done; as if he had said in plain terms, How can this be accomplished? for so God interprets his reasoning, ver. 23: 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short?' So Mary, John xi. 32: 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.' And her sister Martha, (ver. 39:) 'Lord, by this time he stinketh.' Both gracious women, yet both betrayed the weakness of their faith on the almighty power of Christ, one limiting him to place—If thou hadst been here, he had not died; as if Christ could not have saved his life absent, as well as present; sent his health to him, as well as brought it with him. The other to time—Now he stinketh. As if Christ had brought his physic too late, and the grave would not deliver up his prisoner at Christ's command. And hast thou such a high opinion of thyself, Christian, that thy faith needs not thy utmost care and endeavour, for further establishment on the almighty power of God, when thou seest such as these dash their foot against this kind of temptation?

The second reason may be taken from the absolute necessity of this act of faith above others, to support the Christian in the hour of temptation. All the Christian's strength and comfort is fetched without doors, and he hath none to send on his errand but faith: this goes to heaven, and knocks God up; as he in the parable, his neighbour at midnight for bread: therefore when faith fails, and the soul hath none to go to market for supplies, there must needs be a poor house kept in the meantime. Now, faith is never quite laid up, till the soul denies, or at least questions, the power of God. Indeed, when the Christian disputes the will of God, whispering within its own bosom, Will he pardon? Will he save? this may make faith go haltingly to the throne of grace, but not knock the soul off from seeking the face of God; even then, faith, on the power of God, will bear it company thither: 'If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,' Matt. viii. 2. If thou wilt, thou canst pardon, thou canst purge: but when the soul concludes he cannot pardon, cannot save, this shoots faith to the heart, so that the soul falls at the foot of Satan, not able more to resist. Now it grows listless to duty, indifferent whether it pray or not; as one that sees the well dry, breaks or throws away his pitcher

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, because God is very tender of this flower of his crown, this part of his name; indeed he cannot spell it right, and leave out this letter; for that is God's name, whereby he is known from all his creatures. Now man may be called wise, merciful, mighty; God only all-wise, all-merciful, all-mighty; so when we leave out this syllable all, we nick-name God, and call him by his creature's name, which he will not answer to. Now the tenderness that God shows to this prerogative of his, appears in three particulars:

First, in the strict command he lays on his people, to give him the glory of his power, Isa. viii. 12, 13: 'Fear ye not their fear, but sanctify the Lord of hosts himself;' that is, in this sad posture of your affairs, when your enemies associate, and you seem a lost people to the eye of reason, not able to contend with such united powers which beset you on every side: now I charge you sanctify me, in giving me the glory of my almighty power; believe that your God is able of himself, without any other, to defend you, and destroy them.

Secondly, In his severity to his dearest children, when they stagger in their faith, and come not off roundly, without reasoning and disputing the case, to rely on his almighty power: Zacharias did but ask the angel, How shall I know this, because I am an old man, and my wife stricken in years? yet for bewraying therein his unbelief, had a sign indeed given him, but such a one as did not only strengthen his faith, but severely punish his unbelief; for he was struck dumb upon the place. God loves his children should believe his word, not dispute his power; so true is that of Luther, *Deus amat curristas non quæristas.* That which gave accent to Abraham's faith, Rom. iv. 21, was that he was 'fully persuaded, that what God had promised he was able to perform.'

Thirdly, In the way God takes of giving his choicest mercies, and greatest salvations to his people, wherein he lays the scene of his providence so, that when he hath done, it may be said almighty power was here. And therefore God commonly puts down those means and second causes, which if they stood about his work, would blind and hinder, the full prospect thereof in effecting the same, 2 Cor. i. 9: 'We received the sentence of death in ourselves, that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' Christ staid while Lazarus was dead, that he might draw the eyes of their faith more singly to look on his power, by raising his dead friend, rather than curing him, being sick, which would not have carried so full a conviction of almightiness with it. Yea, he suffers a contrary power many times to arise in that very juncture of time when he intends the mercy to his people, that he may rear up the more magnificent pillar of remembrance to his own power, in the ruin of that which contends with him. Had God brought Israel out of Egypt in the time of those kings which knew Joseph, most likely they might have had a friendly departure and an easy deliverance; but God reserves this for the reign of that proud Pharaoh, who shall cruelly oppress them, and venture his kingdom, but he will satisfy his lust upon them. And why must this be the time? but that God would bring them forth with a stretched out arm: the magnifying of his power was God's great design, Exod. ix. 16: 'In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, to show in thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout the earth.'

Fourthly, In the prevalency which an argument that is pressed from his almighty power hath with God. It was the last string Moses had to his bow, when he begged the life of Israel, Numb. xiv. 16; 'The nations which have heard the fame of thee, will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able,' &c. And ver. 17: 'Let the power of my Lord be great;' and with this he hath their pardon thrown him.

The application of this point will fall in under the next, which is

CHAPTER IV.

OF ACTING OUR FAITH ON THE ALMIGHTY POWER OF GOD, AS ENGAGED FOR OUR HELP.

Doct. THAT it is the saints' duty, and should be their care, not only to believe God Almighty, but also strongly to believe that this almighty power of God is theirs, that is, engaged to their defence and help, so as to make use of it in all straits and temptations.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—First, I shall prove that the almighty power of God is engaged for the Christian's defence; with the grounds of it.

Secondly, Why the Christian should strongly act his faith on this.

First, The almighty power of God is engaged for the saints' defence: God brought Israel out of Egypt with a high hand; but did he set them down on the other side the Red Sea, to find and force their way to Canaan, by their own policy or power? When he had opened the iron gate of their house of bondage and brought them into the open fields, did he vanish as the angel from Peter, when out of prison? No, as a man carries his son, so the Lord bare them in all the way they went, Deut. i. 31. This doth lively set forth the saints' march to heaven: God brings a soul out of spiritual Egypt by his converting grace; that is, the day of his power, wherein he makes the soul willing to come out of Satan's clutches. Now when the saint is upon his march, all the country riseth upon him. How shall this poor creature pass the pikes, and get safely by all his enemies' borders? God himself enfolds him in the arm of his everlasting strength: 'We are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.' 1 Pet. i. 5. The power of God is that 'shoulder,' on which Christ carries his sheep home, rejoicing all the way he goes, Luke xv. 5. These everlasting arms of his strength are those eagles' wings, upon which the saints are both tenderly and securely conveyed to glory, Exod. xix. 4. There is a fivefold tie or engagement that lies upon God's power, to be the saints' life-guard.

First, The near relation he hath to his saints: they are his own dear children; every one takes care of his own; the silly hen, how doth she bustle and bestir herself to gather her brood under her wing when the kite appears! No care like that which nature teacheth. How much more will God, who is the Father of such dispositions in his creatures, stir up his whole strength to defend his children! 'He said, They are my people; so he became their Saviour,' Isa. xxxiii. 8. As if God had said, Shall I sit still with my hand in my bosom, while my own people are thus misused before my face? I cannot bear it. The mother, as she sits in her house, hears one shriek, and knows the voice, cries out, O it is my child! Away she throws all, and runs to him. Thus God takes the alarm of his children's cry: 'I heard Ephraim bemoaning himself,' said the Lord; his cry pierced his ear, and his ear affected his bowels, and his bowels called up his power to the rescue of him.

Secondly, The dear love he beareth to his saints engageth his power. He that hath God's heart cannot want his arm. Love in the creature commands all the other affections, sets all the powers of the whole man on work; thus in God, love sets all his other attributes on work; when God once pitched his thoughts on doing good to lost man, then wisdom fell on projecting the way; almighty power, that undertook to raise the fabric according to wisdom's model. All are ready to effect what God saith he likes. Now the believing soul is an object of God's choicest love, even the same with which he loves his Son, John xvii. 26.

First, God loves the believer as the birth of his everlasting counsel; when a soul believes, then God's eternal purpose and counsel concerning him, whom he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world, and with whom his thoughts went so long big, brings forth. And how must God needs love that creature, whom he carried so long in the womb of his eternal purpose! This goodly fabric of heaven and earth hath not been built, but as a stage whereon he would in time act what he decreed in heaven of old, concerning the saving of thee, and a few more of his elect; and therefore according to the same rate of delight with which God pleased and entertained himself in the thoughts of this before the world was, must he needs rejoice over the soul now believing with love and complacency unconceivable; and God having brought his counsel thus far towards its issue, surely will raise all the power he hath, rather than be disappointed of his glory within a few steps of home; I mean, his whole design in the believer's salvation; the Lord who hath chosen his saints (as Christ prays for Joshua their representative) will rebuke Satan and all their enemies, Zech. iii.

Secondly, God loves his saints as the purchase of his Son's blood: they cost him dear; and that which is so hardly got shall not be easily lost. He that was

Digitized by Google

willing to expend his Son's blood to gain them, will not deny his power to keep them.

Thirdly, God loves the saints for their likeness to himself; so that if he loves himself, he cannot but love himself appearing in them; and as he loves himself in them, so he defends himself in defending them. What is it in a saint that enrageth hell, but the image of God, without which the war would soon be at an end? It is the hatred the panther hath to man that makes him fly at his picture; 'for thy sake are we slain all the day long:' and if the quarrel be God's, surely the saint shall not go forth to war at his own cost.

Thirdly, The covenant engageth God's almighty power, Gen. xvii. 1: 'I am the Almighty God, walk before me.' There is a league offensive and defensive between God and his saints; he gives it under his hand, that he will put forth the whole power of his godhead for them, 1 Chron. xvii. 24: 'The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel.' God doth not parcel himself out by retail, but gives his saints leave to challenge whatever God hath as theirs; and let him, whoever he is, sit in God's throne, and take away his crown, that can fasten any untruth on the Holy One; as his name is, so his nature, a God keeping covenant for ever. The promises stand as the mountains about Jerusalem, never to be removed; the weak as well as the strong Christian is within this line of communication. Were saints to fight it out in open field, by the strength of their own grace, then the strong were more likely to stand, and the weak to fall in battle; but both, castled in the covenant, are alike safe.

Fourthly, The saints' dependence on God, and expectation from God in all their straits, oblige this power for their succour: whither doth a gracious soul fly in any want or danger from sin, Satan, or his instruments, but to his God? as naturally as the coney to her burrow, Ps. lvii. 3. 'At what time I am afraid,' saith David, 'I will trust in thee:' he tells God he will make bold of his house to step into, when taken in any storm; and doth not question his welcome. Thus when Saul hunted him, he left a city of gates and bars, to trust God in open field. Indeed, all the saints are taught the same lesson; to renounce their own strength, and rely on the power of God; their own policy, and cast themselves on the wisdom of God; their own righteousness, and expect all from the pure mercy of God in Christ; which act of faith is so pleasing to God, that such a soul shall never be ashamed, Ps. ix. 18. 'The expectation of the poor shall not perish.' A heathen could say, when a bird, scared by a hawk, flew into his bosom, I will not betray thee unto thy enemy, seeing thou comest for sanctuary unto me. How much less will God yield up a soul unto its enemy, when it takes sanctuary in his name, saying, Lord, I am hunted with such a temptation, dogged with such a lust; either thou must pardon it, or I am damned; mortify it, or I shall be a slave to it; take me into the bosom of thy love, for Christ's sake; castle me in the arms of thy everlasting strength; it is in thy power to save me from, or give me up into the hands of my enemy; I have no confidence in myself or any other: into thy hands I commit my cause myself, and rely on thee. This dependence of a soul undoubtedly will awaken the almighty power of God for such a one's defence. He hath sworn the greatest oath that can come out of his blessed lips, even by himself, that such as thus fly for refuge to hope in him, shall have strong consolation, Heb. vi. 17. This indeed may give the saint the greater boldness of faith to expect kind entertainment, when he repairs to God for refuge, because he cannot come before he is looked for; God having set up his name and promises as a strong tower, both calls his people into these chambers, and expects they should betake themselves thither.

Fifthly, Christ's presence and employment in heaven lays a strong engagement on God to bring his whole force and power into the field, upon all occasions, for his saints' defence; one special end of his journey to heaven, and abode there is, that he might, as the saints' solicitor, be ever interceding for such supplies and succours of his Father, as their exigencies call for; and the more to assure us of the same before he went, he did, as it were, tell us, what heads he meant to go upon in his intercession when he should come there; one of which was this, that his Father should keep his children, while they were to stay in the world, from the evil thereof, John xvii. 15. Neither doth Christ take upon him this work of his own head, but hath the same appointment of his Father, for what he now prays in

Digitized by Google

heaven, as he had for what he suffered on earth: he that ordained him a priest to die for sinners, did not then strip him of his priestly garments, as Aaron, but appoints him to ascend in them to heaven, where he sits a priest for ever by God's oath. And this office of intercession was erected purely in mercy to believers, that they might have full content given them for the performance of all that God hath promised; so that Jesus Christ attends at court as our ambassador, to see all carried fairly between God and us according to agreement; and if Christ follows his business close, and be faithful in his place to believers, all is well: and doth it not behove him to be so, who intercedes for such dear relations? Suppose a king's son should get out of a besieged city, where he had left his wife and children, whom he loves as his own soul, and these all ready to die by sword or famine, if supply came not the sooner; could this prince, when he arrived at his father's house, please himself with the delights of the court, and forget the distress of his family? Or rather, would he not come post to his father, having their cries and groans always in his ears, and before he eat or drink, do his errand to his father, and entreat him, if ever he loved him, that he would send all the force of his kingdom to raise the siege, rather than any of his dear relations should perish? Surely, sirs, though Christ be in the top of his preferment, and out of the storm in regard of his own person, yet his children left behind in the midst of sin, Satan, and the world's batteries, are in his heart, and shall not be forgotten a moment by him. The care he takes in our business, appeared in the speedy despatch he made of his Spirit to his apostles' supply, when he ascended, which as soon almost as he was warm in his seat, at his Father's right hand, he sent, to the incomparable comfort of his apostles and us, that to this day, yea, to the end of the world do, or shall believe on him.

SECTION II.—The second branch of the point follows: that saints should eye this power of God as engaged for them; and press it home upon their souls, till they silence all doubts and fears about the matter; which is the importance of this exhortation: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.' Fortify and entrench your souls within the breastwork of this attribute of God's mighty power, made over to you by God himself.

First, It is the end as of all promises to be security to our faith; so of those in particular, where his almighty power is expressly engaged, that we may count this attribute our portion, and reap the comfort it yields as freely as one may the crop of his own field. 'Walk before me,' saith God to Abraham, 'I am God Almighty;' set on this as thy portion, and live upon it; the apostle, Heb. xiii. 6, teacheth us what use to make of promises; ver. 5, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,'—there is the promise; and the inference, which he teacheth us to draw by faith from this, follows, ver. 6, 'So we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper.' We, that is, every believer, may boldly say, that is, we may conclude God will help; not sneakingly, timorously, perhaps he will; but we may boldly assert it in the face of men and devils, because He that is almighty hath said it. Now for a Christian not to strengthen his faith on this incomparably sweet attribute, but to sit down with a few weak unsettled hopes, when he may, yea, ought to be strong in the faith of such promises; what is it but to undervalue the blessing of such promises? As if one should promise another house and land, and bid him make them as sure to himself as the law can bind, and he should take no care to effect this; would it not be interpreted as a slighting of his friend's kindness? Is it a small matter that God passeth over his almighty power by promise to us, and bids us make it as sure to ourselves as we can by faith, and we neglect this, leaving the writings of the promises unsealed on our hearts?

Secondly, Our obedience and comfort are strong or weak, as our faith is on this principle.

First, Our obedience, that being a child of faith, partakes of its parent's strength or weakness. Abraham being strong in faith, what an heroic act of obedience did he perform in offering up his son? His faith being well set on the power of God, he carries that without staggering, which would have laid a weak faith on the ground. No act of faith more strengthens for duty than that which eyes God's almighty power engaged for its assistance. 'Go in this thy might,' said God to Gideon, 'have not I called thee?' as if he had said, Can I

Digitized by Google

not, will I not carry thee through thy work? Away goes Gideon in the faith of this, and doth wonders. This brought the righteous man from the east to God's foot, though he knew not whither he went, yet he knew with whom he went, God Almighty. But take a soul not persuaded of this; how uneven and unstable is he in this obediential course! Every threat from man, if mighty, dismays him, because his faith is not fixed on the Almighty, and therefore sometimes he will shift off a duty to comply with man, and betray his trust into the hands of a sorry creature, because he hath fleshly eyes to behold the power of man, but wants a spiritual eye to see God at his back, to protect him with his almighty power; which, were his eyes open to see, he would not be so routed in his thoughts at the approach of a weak creature: 'Should such a man as I flee?' saith good Nehemiah, Neh. vi. 11. He was newly come from the throne of grace, where he had called in the help of the Almighty, ver. 9. 'O God, strengthen my hands.' And truly now he will rather die upon the place, than disparage his God with a dishonourable retreat.

Secondly, The Christian's comfort increaseth or wanes, as the aspect of his faith is to the power of God. Let the soul question that, or his interest in it, and his joy gusheth out, even as blood out of a broken vein; it is true, a soul may scramble to heaven with much ado, by a faith of recumbency, relying on God as able to save, without this persuasion of its interest in God, but such a soul goes with a scant side wind, or like a ship whose masts are laid by the board, exposed to wind and weather, if others better appointed did not tow it along with them. Many fears like waves ever and anon cover such a soul, that it is more under water than above; whereas one that sees itself folded in the arms of almighty power, O how such a soul goes mounting afore the wind, with her sails filled with joy and peace! Let afflictions come, storms arise, this blessed soul knows where it shall land and be welcome. The name of God is his harbour, where he puts in as boldly as a man steps into his own house, when taken in a shower. He hears God calling him into this and other his attributes, as chambers taken up for him, Isa. xxvi. 'Come, my people, enter into thy chambers.' God calls them his, and it were foolish modesty not to own what God gives; Isa. xlv. 24, 'Surely shall a man say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength;' that is, I have righteousness in God's righteousness, strength in his strength; so that in this respect Christ can no more say that his strength is his own, and not the believer's, than the husband can say, my body is my own, and not my wife's. A soul persuaded of this, may sing merrily with the sharpest thorn at his breast; so David, Psalm lvii. 7, 'My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.' What makes him so merry in so sad a place as the cave where now he was? He will tell you in ver. 1, where you have him nestling himself under the shadow of God's wings, and now well may he sing care and fear away. A soul thus provided, may be at ease on a hard bed. Do you not think they sleep as soundly who dwell on London-bridge, as they who live at Whitehall or Cheapside, knowing the waves that roar under them cannot hurt them? Even so may the saints rest quietly over the floods of death itself, and fear no ill.

Section III.—*Use* 1. Is the almighty power of God engaged for the saints' defence? Surely then they will have a hard pull, the saints' enemies I mean, who meddle with them that are so far above their match. The devil was so cunning, that he would have Job out of his trench, his hedge down, before he would fall on; but so desperate are men, that they will try the field with the saints, though encircled with the almighty power of God. What folly were it to attempt, or sit down before such a city, which cannot be blocked up so as no relief can get in? The way to heaven cannot. In the church's straitest siege, there is a river which shall make glad this city of God, with seasonable succours from heaven. The saints' fresh springs are all from God; and it is as feasible for sorry man to stop the water-courses of the clouds, as to dam up those streams, which invincibly glide like veins of water in the earth, from the fountain-head of his mercy, into the bosom of his people. The Egyptians thought they had Israel in a trap, when they saw them march into such a nook by the sea side. They are entangled, they are entangled; and truly so they had been irrecoverably, had not that almighty power which led them on, engaged to bring them off with honour and

Digitized by Google

safety. Well, when they are out of this danger, behold, they are in a wilderness, where nothing is to be had for back and belly, and yet here they shall live forty years, without trade or tillage, without begging or robbing of any of the neighbour nations; they shall not be beholden to them for a penny in their way. What cannot almighty power do to provide for his people? What can it not do to protect them against the power and wrath of their enemies? Almighty power stood between the Israelites and Egyptians; so that, poor creatures, they could not so much as come to see their enemy. God sets up a dark cloud as a blind before their eyes; and all the while, his eye through the cloud is looking them into disorder and confusion. And is the Almighty grown weaker now-a-days, or his enemies stronger, that they promise themselves better success? No, neither; but men are blinder than the saints' enemies of old, who sometimes have fled at the appearance of God among his people, crying out, 'Let us flee, for the Lord fighteth for them.' Whereas there be many now-a-days will rather give the honour of their discomfitures to Satan himself, than acknowledge God in the business; more ready to say the devil fought against them, than God. O you that have not yet worn off the impressions which the almighty power of God hath at any time made upon your spirits, beware of having anything to do with this generation of men, whoever they are. Come not near their tabernacle, cast not thy lot in amongst them, who are enemies to the saints of the Most High; for they are men devoted to destruction. God so loves his saints that he makes nothing to give whole nations for their ransom. He ripped open the very womb of Egypt, to save the life of Israel his child, Isa. xliii. 3.

Use 2.—This shews the dismal, deplorable condition of all you who are yet in a Christless state; you have seen a rich mine opened, but not a penny of this treasure comes to your share; truth laden with incomparable comfort, but it is bound for another coast; it belongs to the saints, into whose bosom this truth unlades all her comfort. See God shutting the door upon you, when he sets his children to feast themselves with such dainties, Isa. lxv. 13, 'My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty.' God hath his set number, which he provides for; he knows how many he hath in his family: these and no more shall sit down. One chief dish at the saints' board, is the almighty power of God; this was set before Abraham, and stands before all his saints, that they may eat to fulness of comforts on it: 'But thou shalt be hungry.' He is almighty to pardon; but he will not use it for thee an impeninent sinner; thou hast not a friend on the bench; not an attribute in all God's name will speak for thee: mercy itself will sit and vote with the rest of his fellow-attributes for thy damnation. God is able to save and help in a time of need; but upon what acquaintance is it that thou art so bold with God, as to expect his saving arm to be stretched forth for thee? Though a man will rise at midnight to let in a child that cries and knocks at his door, yet he will not take so much pains for a dog, that lies howling there. This presents thy condition, sinner; sad enough! yet this is to tell thy story fairest: for that almighty power of God which is engaged for the believer's salvation, is as deeply obliged to bring thee to thy execution and damnation. What greater tie than an oath? God himself is under an oath to be the destruction of every impenitent soul. The oath which God sware in his wrath against the unbelieving Israelites, that they should not enter into his rest, concerns every unbeliever to the end of the world. In the name of God consider, were it but the oath of a man, or a company of men, that, like those in the Acts, should swear to be the death of such an one, and thou wert the man, would it not fill thee with fear and trembling night and day, and take away the quiet of thy life, till they were made friends? What then are their pillows stuffed with, who can sleep so soundly without any horror or amazement, though they be told that the Almighty God is under an oath of damning them body and soul, without timely repentance? O bethink yourselves, sinners, is it wisdom, or valour, to refuse terms of mercy from God's hands, whose almighty power, if rejected, will soon bring you into the hands of justice? And how fearful a thing that is, to fall into the hands of Almighty God, no tongue can express, no, not they who feel the weight of it.

Use 3.—This speaks to you, that are saints indeed. Be strong in the faith of this truth, make it an article of your creed; with the same faith that you

Digitized by Google

believe there is a God, believe also this God's almighty power is thy sure friend, and then improve it to thy best advantage. As,

First, In agonies of conscience that arise from the greatness of thy sins, fly for refuge into the almighty power of God. Truly, sirs, when a man's sins are displayed in all their bloody colours, and spread forth in their killing aggravations, and the eye of conscience awakened to behold them through the multiplying or magnifying glass of a temptation, they must needs surprise the creature with horror and amazement, till the soul can say with the prophet, for all this huge host, 'There is yet more with me than against me.' One Almighty is more than many mighties. All these mighty sins and devils make not any almighty sin, or an almighty devil. Oppose to all the hideous charges brought against thee by them, this only attribute. As the French ambassador once silenced the Spainard's pride in repeating his master's many titles, with one that drowned them all. God himself, Hos. xi. 9, when he had aggravated his people's sins to the height, then to show what a God can do, breaks out into a sweet promise: 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger:' and why not? 'I am God, and not man.' I will show the almightiness of my mercy. Something like our usual phrase, when a child or a woman strikes us; I am a man, and not a child or woman, therefore I will not strike again. The very considering God to be God, supposeth him to be almighty to pardon, as well as to avenge, and this is some relief; but then to consider it is almighty power in bond and covenant to pardon, this is more; as none can bind God but himself, so none can break the bond himself makes; and are they not his own words, that 'he will abundantly pardon?' Isa. lv. He will multiply to pardon; as if he had said, I will drop mercy with your sin, and spend all I have, rather then let it be said my good is overcome of your evil. It fares with the gracious soul in this case, as with a captain that yields his castle upon gracious terms of having his life spared, and he safely conveyed to his house, there to be settled peaceably in his estate and possession, for all which he hath the general's hand and seal; on which he marched forth, but the rude soldiers assault him, and put him in fear of his life; he appeals to the general, whose honour is now engaged for him, and is presently relieved, and his enemies punished. Thou mayest, poor soul, when accused by Satan, molested by his terrors, say, It is God that justifies; I have his hand to it, that I should have my life given me as soon as I laid down my arms and submitted to him, which I desire to do; behold the gates of my heart are open to let the Prince of Peace in, and is not the Almighty able to perform his promise? I commit myself to him as unto a faithful Creator.

Secondly, Improve this almighty power of God and thy interest therein, in temptations to sin; when thou art overpowered, and fleest before the face of thy strong corruption, or fearest thou shalt one day fall by it, make bold to take hold of this attribute, and reinforce thyself from it; again to resist, and in resisting, to believe a timely victory over it. The Almighty God stands in sight of thee while thou art in the valley fighting, and stays but for a call from thee when distressed in battle, and then he will come to thy rescue. Jehosophat cried, when in the throng of his enemies, and the Lord helped him; much more mayest thou promise thyself his succour in thy soul-combats. Betake thyself to the throne of grace with that promise, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' and before thou urgest it, the more to help thy faith, comfort thyself with this, that though this word Almighty is not expressed, yet it is implied in this and every promise; and thou mayest, without adding a tittle to the word of God, read it in thy soul; 'Sin shall not have dominion over you,' saith the Almighty God; for this and all his attributes are the constant seal to all his promises. Now, soul, put the bond in suit, fear not the recovery, it is debt, and so due. He is able whom thou suest, and so there is no fear of losing the charge of the suit; and he that was so gracious to bind himself when he was free, will be so faithful, being able, to perform now he is bound; only while thou expectest the performance of the promise, and the assistance of this almighty power against thy corruptions, take heed that thou keep under the shadow of this attribute, and condition of this promise, Psa. xci. 1. The shadow will not cool, except in it. What good to have the shadow, though of a mighty rock, when we sit in the

Digitized by Google

open sun? To have almighty power engaged for us, and we to throw ourselves out of the protection thereof, by bold sallies into the mouth of temptation? The saints' falls have been when they run out of their trench and hold; for, like the conies, they are a weak people in themselves, and their strength lies in the rock of God's almightiness which is their habitation.

Thirdly, Christian, improve this, when oppressed with the weight of any duty and service, which in thy place and calling lies upon thee. Perhaps thou findest the duty of thy calling too heavy for thy weak shoulders; make bold by faith to lay the heaviest end of thy burden on God's shoulder, which is thine, if a believer, as sure as God can make it by promise. When at any time thou art sick of thy work, and ready to think with Jonas to run from it, encourage thyself with that of God to Gideon, whom he called from the flail to thresh the mountains: Go in this thy might; hath not God called thee? Fall to the work God sets thee about, and thou engagest his strength for thee. 'The way of the Lord is strength.' Run from thy work, and thou engagest God's strength against thee; he will send some storm or other after thee to bring home his runaway servant. How oft hath the coward been killed in a ditch, or under some hedge, when the valiant soldier that stood his ground and kept his place, got off with safety and honour? Art thou called to suffer? Flinch not because thou art afraid thou shalt never be able to bear the cross; God can lay it so even that thou shalt not feel it: though thou shouldst find no succour till thou comest to the prison door, yea, till thou hast one foot on the ladder, or thy neck on the block, despair not. 'In the mount will the Lord be seen.' And in that hour he can give thee such a look of his sweet face as shall make the blood come in the ghastly face of a cruel death, and appear lovely in thy eye for his sake. He can give thee so much comfort in hand, as thou shalt acknowledge God is aforehand with thee, for all the shame and pain thou canst endure for him. And if it should not amount to this, yet so much as will bear all thy charges thou canst be put to in the way, lies ready told in that promise, 1 Cor. x. 13. Thou shalt have it at sight; and this may satisfy a Christian, especially if he considers, though he doth not carry so much of heaven's joy about him to heaven as others, yet he shall meet it as soon as he comes to his Father's house, where it is reserved for him. In a word, Christian rely upon thy God, and make thy daily applications to the throne of grace, for continual supplies of strength; you little think how kindly he takes it, that he will make use of him, the oftener the better; and the more you come for, the more welcome; else why would Christ have told his disciples, 'Hitherto ye have asked nothing,' but to express his large heart in giving, loath to put his hand to his purse for a little, and therefore by a familiar kind of rhetoric puts them to rise higher in asking, as Naaman, when Gehazi asked one talent, entreats him to take two. Such a bountiful heart thy God hath, while thou art asking a little peace and joy, he bids thee open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it. Go and ransack thy heart, Christian, from one end to the other; find out thy wants, acquaint thyself with all thy weaknesses, and set them before the Almighty, as the widow her empty vessel before the prophet; hadst thou more than thou canst bring, thou mayest have them all filled. God hath strength enough to give, but he hath no strength to deny: here the Almighty himself, with reverence be it spoken, is weak; even a child, the weakest in grace of his family that can but say Father, is able to overcome him, and therefore let not the weakness of thy faith discourage thee. No greater motive to the bowels of mercy to stir up almighty power to relieve thee, than thy weakness, when pleaded in the sense of it. The pale face and thin cheeks, I hope, move more with us, than the canting language of a stout sturdy beggar. Thus that soul that comes laden in the sense of his weak faith, love, patience, the very weakness of them carries an argument along with them for succour.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN IS ANSWERED A GRAND OBJECTION THAT SOME DISCONSOLATE SOULS MAY RAISE AGAINST THE FORMER DISCOURSE.

Object. O BUT, saith some disconsolate Christian, I have prayed again and again for strength against such a corruption, and to this day my hands are

Digitized by Google

weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are so strong, that I am ready to say, all the preachers do but flatter me, that do pour their oil of comfort upon my head, and tell me I shall at last get the conquest of these mine enemies, and see that joyful day wherein, with David, I shall 'sing to the Lord, for delivering me out of the hands of all mine enemies.' I have prayed for strength for such a duty, and find it come off as weakly and dead-heartedly as before. If God be with me by his mighty power to help me, why then is all this befallen me?

Answer. First, Look once again, poor heart, into thine own bosom, and see whether thou findest not some strength sent into thee, which thou didst overlook before; this may be, yea, very ordinary in this case, when God answers our prayer, not in the letter, or when the thing itself is sent, but it comes in at the back door, while we are expecting it at the fore; and truly thus the friend thou art looking for may be in thine house, and thou not know it. Is not this thy case, poor soul? Thou hast been praying for strength against such a lust, and now thou wouldest have God presently put forth his power to knock it on the head, and lay it for dead, that it should never stir more in thy bosom. Is not this the door thou hast stood looking for God to come in at, and no sight or news of thy God is coming that way? Thy corruption yet stirs, it may be is more troublesome than before; now thou askest, where is the strength promised for thy relief? Let me entreat thee, before thou layest down that sad conclusion against thy God or self, see whether he hath not conveyed in some strength by another door. Perhaps thou hast not strength to conquer it so soon as thou desirest; but hath he not given further praying strength against it? Thou prayedst before, but now more earnestly; all the powers of thy soul are up to plead with God. Before, thou wast more favourable and moderate in thy request; now thou hast a zeal, thou canst take no denial; yea, welcome any thing in the room of thy corruption: would God but take thy sin and send a cross, thou wouldst bless him. Now, poor soul, is this nothing, no strength? Had not thy God reinforced thee, thy sin would have weakened the spirit of thy prayer, and not increased it. David began to recover himself when he began to recover his spirit of prayer. The stronger the cry, the stronger the child, I warrant you. Jacob wrestled, and this is called his strength, Hos. xii. It appeared there was much of God in him, that it could take such hold of the Almighty as to keep it, though God seemed to shake him off. If thus thou art enabled, soul, to deal with the God of heaven, no fear but thou shalt be much more able to deal with Sin and Satan. If God hath given thee so much strength to wrestle with him above and against denials, thou hast prevailed with the stronger of the two. Overcome God, and he will overcome the other for thee. Again, perhaps thou hast been praying for further strength to be communicated to thee in duty, that thou mightest be more spiritual, vigorous, united, sincere, and the like therein; and yet thou findest thy old distempers hanging about thee, as if thou hadst never acquainted God with thy malady. Well, soul, look once again into thy bosom with an unprejudiced eye, though thou dost not find the assisting strength thou prayedst for, yet hast thou no more self-abasing strength. Perhaps the annoyance thou hast from these remaining distempers in duty, occasions thee to have a meaner opinion of all thy duties than ever, yea, they make thee abhor thyself in the sense of these, as if thou hadst so many loathsome vermin about thee. Job's condition on the dunghill, with all his blotches and running sores on his body, appears desirable to thee, in comparison of thine, whose soul thou complainest is worse than his body. O this afflicts thy soul deeply, doth it not, that thou shouldest appear before the Lord with such a dead divided heart, and do his work worst that deserves best at thy hands; and is all this nothing? Surely, Christian, thine eyes are held as much as Hagar's, or else thou wouldst see the streamings forth of divine grace in this frame of thy heart; surely others will think God hath done a mighty work in thy soul. What harder and more against the grain than to bring our proud hearts to take shame for that whereof they naturally boast and glory? And is it nothing for thee, to tread on the very neck of thy duties, and count them matter of thy humiliation and abasing, which others make the matter of their confidence and self-rejoicing? Good store of virtue hath gone from Christ to dry this issue of pride in thy heart, which sometimes in gracious

Digitized by Google

ones runs through and through their duties, that it is seen, may be, by those that have less grace than themselves.

Second, Christian, candidly interpret God's dealings with thee. Suppose it be as thou sayest, thou hast pleaded the promise, and waited on the means, and yet findest no strength from all these receipts, either in thy grace or comfort; now take heed of charging God foolishly, as if God were not what he promised; this were to give that to Satan which he is all this while gaping for. It is more becoming the dutiful disposition of a child, when he hath not presently what he writes for to his father, to say, My father is wiser than I; his wisdom will prompt him what and when to send to me, and his fatherly affections to me his child will neither suffer him to deny anything that is good, nor slip the time that is seasonable. Christian, thy heavenly Father hath gracious ends that hold his hands at present, or else thou hadst ere this heard from him.

First, God may deny further degrees of strength, to put thee on the exercise of that thou hast more carefully. As a mother doth by her child that is learning to go, she sets it down, and stands some distance from it, and bids it come to her; the child feels its legs weak, and cries for the mother's help, but the mother steps back on purpose that the child should put forth all its little strength in making after her. When a poor soul comes and prays against such a sin, God seems to step back and stand at a distance; the temptation increaseth, and no visible succour appears, on purpose that the Christian, though weak, should exercise that strength he hath. Indeed we shall find the sense of a soul's weakness is an especial means to excite it into a further care and diligence: one that knows his weakness, how prone he is in company to forget himself, in passion how apt he is to fly out; if there be a principle of true grace, this will excite him to be more fearful and watchful than another that hath obtained greater strength against such great temptations. As a child that writes for money to his father; none comes presently; that makes him husband that little he hath the better; not a penny now shall be laid out idly. Thus, when a Christian hath prayed against such a sin again and again, and yet finds himself weak, prone to be worsted; O how careful will this, should this make such a one of every company, of every occasion! Such a one had not need give his enemy any advantage.

Second, God may deny the Christian such assisting strength in duty, or mortifying strength of corruption, as he desires, purely on a gracious design, that he may thereby have an advantage of expressing his love in such a way as shall most kindly work on the ingenuity of the soul to love God again. Perhaps, Christian, thou prayest for a mercy thou wantest, or for deliverance out of some great affliction, and in the duty thou findest not more assistance than ordinary, yea, many distractions of spirit in it, and misgiving thoughts with unbelieving fears after it: well, notwithstanding those defects in thy duty, yet God hears thy prayer, and sends in the mercy on purpose that he may greaten his love in thine eye, and make it more luscious and sweet to thy taste, from his accepting thy weak services, and passing by the distempers of thy spirit. Here is less strength for the duty, that thou mayest have more love in the mercy; nothing will affect a gracious heart more than such a consideration. See it in David, Psal. cxvi. 11, 12: 'I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me!' As if David had said, 'Notwithstanding all the comfortable messages I had from God by his prophets concerning this matter, my own prayers, and those remarkable providences, which carried in them a partial answer to them, and performance of what was promised, yet I betrayed much unbelief, questioning the truth of the one, and the return of the other; and hath God notwithstanding all my infirmities fulfilled my desire, and performed his promise? O what shall I render unto the Lord?' Thus David reads God's mercy through the spectacles of his own weakness and infirmity, and it appears great; whereas if a mercy should come in, as an answer to a duty managed with such strength of faith, and height of other graces, as might free him and his duty from usual infirmities, this might prove a snare, and occasion some self-applauding, rather than mercy-admiring thoughts in the creature.

Third, God may communicate the less of his assisting strength, that he may

Digitized by Google

show the more of his supporting strength, in upholding weak grace: we do not wonder to see a man of strong constitution, that eats his bread heartily, and sleeps soundly, live: but for a crazy body, full of pains and infirmities, to be so patched and shored up by the physician's art, that he stands to old age, this begets some wonder in the beholders. It may be thou art a poor trembling soul, thy faith is weak, and thy assaults from Satan strong, thy corruptions stirring and active, and thy mortifying strength little, so that in thy opinion they rather gain ground on thy grace, than give ground to it; ever and anon thou art ready to think thou shalt be cast as a wreck on the devil's shore: and yet to this day thy grace lives, though full of leaks. Now is it not worth the stepping aside to see this strange sight? A broken ship with maste and hull rent and torn, thus towed along by almighty power, through an angry sea and armadoes of sins and devils, safely into his harbour? To see a poor taper or rush candle in the face of the boisterous wind, and not blown out; in a word, to see a weak stripling in grace held up in God's arms till he defeats the devil? This God is doing in upholding thee: thou art one of those babes, out of whose mouth God is perfecting his praise, by ordaining such strength for thee, that thou, a babe in grace, shalt yet foil a giant in wrath and power.

Third, If after long waiting for strength from God, it be as thou complainest, inquire whether that which hinders be not found in thyself. The head is the seat of animal spirits, yet there may be such obstructions in the body, as the other members may for a time be deprived of them; till the passage be free between Christ, thy head, and thee, thy strength will not come: and therefore be willing to inquire,

First, Hast thou come indeed to God for strength to perform duty, to mortify corruption, and the like? Perhaps thou wilt say, Yes, I have waited on those ordinances, which are the way in which he hath promised to give out strength. But is this all? Thou mayest come to them, and not wait on God in them. Hast thou not carnally expected strength from them, and so put the ordinance in God's stead? Hath not the frame of thy spirit some affinity with theirs in James iv. 13: 'We will go into such a city, and buy, and sell, and get gain?' Hath not thy heart said, I will go and hear such a man, and get comfort, get strength? and dost thou wonder that thou art weak, barren, and unfruitful? Are ordinances God, that they should make you strong or comfortable? Thou mayest hear them answer thee, poor soul, as the king to the woman in the siege of Samaria: Help, O prayer, sayest thou: or, O minister, how can they help, except the Lord help? These are but Christ's servants: Christ keeps the key of his wine cellar; they cannot so much as make you drink, when you come to your master's houses; and therefore, poor soul, stay not short of Christ, but press through all the crowd of ordinances, and ask to speak with Jesus, to see Jesus, and touch him, and virtue will come forth.

Second, Ask thy soul whether thou hast been thankful for that little strength thou hast. Though thou art not of that strength in grace to run with the foremost, and hold pace with the tallest of thy brethren, yet, art thou thankful that thou hast any strength at all? Though it be but to cry after them, whom thou seest outstrip thee in grace, this is worth thy thanks. All in David's army attained not to be equal with his few worthies in prowess and honour, and yet did not cashier themselves: thou hast reason to be thankful for the meanest place in the army of saints: the least communications of gospel-mercy and grace must not be overlooked. As soon as Moses with his army was through the sea, they strike up before they stir from the bank-side, and acknowledge the wonderful appearance of God's power and mercy for them, though this was but one step in their way; a howling wilderness presented itself to them, and they not able to subsist a few days with all their provision, for all their great victory; yet Moses, he will praise God for this earnest of mercy. This holy man knew the only way to keep credit with God, so as to have more, was to pay down his praise for what was received. If thou wouldest have fuller communications of divine strength, own God in what he hath done. Art thou weak? bless God thou hast life. Dost thou through feebleness often fail in duty, and fall into temptation? mourn in the sense of these; yet bless God that thou dost not live in a total neglect of duty, out of a profane contempt

Digitized by Google

thereof, and that instead of falling through weakness, thou dost not lie in the mire of sin through the wickedness of thy heart. The unthankful soul may thank itself it thrives no better.

Third, Art thou humble under the assistance and strength God hath given thee? pride stops the conduit. If the heart begins to swell, it is time for God to hold his hand, and turn the cock; for all that is poured on such a soul, runs over into self-applauding, and so is as water spilt in regard of any good it doth the creature, or any glory it brings to God. A proud heart and a lofty mountain are never fruitful. Now, beside the common ways that pride discovers itself, as by undervaluing others, and overvaluing itself, and such like, you shall observe two other symptoms of it. First, it appears in bold adventures, when a person runs into the mouth of temptation, bearing himself on the confidence of his grace received. This was Peter's sin, by which he was drawn to engage further than became an humble faith, running into the devil's quarters, and so became his prisoner for awhile. The good man, when in his right temper, had thoughts low enough of himself; as when he asked his Master, 'Is it I?' But he that feared at one time, lest he might be the traitor at another, cannot think so ill of himself, as to suspect he should be the denier of his Master. What he? No, though all the rest forsake him, yet *he* would stand to his colours. Is this thy case, Christian? Possibly God hath given thee much of his mind, thou art skilful in the word of life, and therefore thou darest venture to breathe in corrupt air, as if only the weak spirits of less knowing Christians exposed them to be infected with the contagion of error and heresy. Thou hast a large portion of grace, or at least thou thinkest so, and venturest to go where an humble-minded Christian would fear his heels should slip under him. Truly now thou temptest God to suffer thy locks to be cut, when thou art so bold to lay thy head in the lap of a temptation. Secondly, Pride appears in the neglect of those means, whereby the saints' graces and comforts are to be fed when strongest. May be, Christian, when thou art under fears and doubts, then God hath thy company, thou art oft with thy pitcher at his door; but when thou hast got any measure of peace, there goes presently some strangeness between God and thee; thy pitcher walks not as it was wont to these wells of salvation. No wonder if thou (though rich in grace and comfort) goest behind-hand, seeing thou spendest on the old stock, and drivest no trade at present to bring in more; or if thou dost not thus neglect duty, yet may be thou dost not perform it with that humility which formerly beautified the same; then thou prayedst in the sense of thy weakness to get strength, now thou prayest to show thy strength, that others may admire thee. And if once (like Hezekiah) we call in spectators to see our treasure and applaud us for our gifts and comfort, then it is high time for God, if he indeed love us, to send some messengers to carry these away from us, which carry our hearts from him.

Fourthly, If thy heart doth not smite thee from what hath been said, but thou hast sincerely waited on God, and yet has not received the strength thou desirest, yet let it be thy resolution to live and die waiting on him. God doth not tell us his time of coming, and it were boldness to set one of our own heads. Go, saith Christ to his disciples, Luke xxiv. 49, 'Stay ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.' Thus he saith to thee; stay at Jerusalem, wait on him in the means he hath appointed, till thou art endued with further power to mortify thy corruptions, &c. And for thy comfort know,

First, Thy thus persevering to wait on God, will be an evidence of strong grace in thee: the less encouragement thou hast to duty, the more thy faith and obedience to bear thee up in duty. He that can trade when times are so dead, that all his ware lies upon his hand, and yet draws not in his hand, but rather trades more and more, sure his stock is great. What, no comfort in hearing, no ease to thy spirit in praying, and yet more greedy to hear, and more frequent in prayer? O soul, great is thy faith and patience!

2. Assure thyself, when thou art at the greatest pinch, strength shall come: 'They that wait on the Lord, shall renew their strength;' when the last 'handful of meal was dressing,' then is the prophet sent to keep the widow's house; when temptation is strong, thy little strength even spent, and thou ready to

Digitized by Google

yield into the hands of thine enemies, then expect succours from heaven to enable thee to hold out under the temptation: thus to Paul, 'My grace is sufficient,' or power from heaven to raise the siege, and drive away the tempter; thus to Job, when Satan had him at an advantage, then God takes him off. Like a wise moderator, when the respondent is hard put to it by a subtle opponent, takes him off, when he would else run him down, James v. 11: 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.'

EPHES. VI. 41.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil.

THIS verse is a key to the former, wherein the apostle had exhorted believers to encourage and bear up their fainting spirits on the Lord, and the power of his might. Now, in these words he explains himself, and shews how he would have them do this; not presumptuously come into the field without that armour, which God hath appointed to be worn by all his soldiers, and yet with a bravado to trust in the power of God to save them. That soul is sure to fall short of home (heaven I mean) who hath nothing but a carnal confidence on the name of God, blown up by the ignorance of God and himself; no, he that would have his confidence duly placed on the power of God, must conscientiously use the means appointed for his defence, and not rush naked into the battle, like that frantic spirit at Munster, who would needs go forth, and chase away the whole army then besieging that city, with no other cannon than a few words charged with the name of the Lord of hosts, (which he blasphemously made bold to use), saying, 'In the name of the Lord of hosts, depart.' But himself soon perished, to learn others wisdom by what he paid for his folly. What foolish braving language shall you hear drop from the lips of the most profane and ignorant among us! They trust in God, hope in his mercy, defy the devil and all his works, and such like stuff, who yet are poor naked creatures, without the least piece of God's armour upon their souls. To cashier such presumption from the saints' camp, he annexeth this directory to his exhortation, 'Put on the whole armour of God,' &c. So that the words fall into these two general parts.

First, A direction annexed to the former exhortation, shewing how we may in a regular way come to be strong in the Lord; that is, by putting on the whole armour of God.

Second, A reason or argument strengthening this direction, 'that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' In the direction observe,

First, The furniture he directs, and that is 'armour.'

Secondly, The kind or quality of this armour, 'armour of God.'

Third, The quantity or entireness of the armour, the whole armour of God.

Fourth, The use of this armour: put on the whole armour of God.

To begin with the first, the furniture which every one must get that would fight Christ's battles, the question here will be, What is this armour?

First, By armour is meant Christ; we read of putting on the Lord Jesus, Rom. xiii. 14, where Christ is set forth under the notion of armour. The apostle doth not exhort them, for rioting and drunkenness, to put on sobriety and temperance; for chambering and wantonness, put on chastity, (as the philosopher would have done), but bids, put on the Lord Jesus Christ; implying thus much, till Christ be put on, the creature is unarmed. It is not a man's morality and philosophical virtues that will repel a temptation, sent with a full charge from Satan's cannon, though possibly it may the pistol shot of some less solicitation, so that he is the man in armour, that is in Christ. Again, the graces of Christ, these are armour, as the girdle of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness and the rest. Hence we are bid also 'put on the new man,' Eph. iv. 24, which is made up of all the several graces, as its parts and members. And he is the unarmed soul, that is the unregenerate soul. Not

Digitized by Google

excluding those duties and means which God hath appointed the Christian to use for defence.

The phrase thus opened; the point is.

CHAPTER I.

SHEWING THE CHRISTLESS AND GRACELESS SOUL, TO BE THE SOUL WITHOUT ARMOUR, AND THEREIN HIS MISERY.

Obs.—That a person in a Christless, graceless state, is naked and unarmed, and so unfit to fight Christ's battles against sin and Satan. Or thus, a soul out of Christ is naked and destitute of all armour to defend them against sin and Satan. God at first sent man forth in complete armour, 'being created in righteousness and true holiness;' but by a wile the devil stripped him, and therefore as soon as the first sin was completed, it is written, Gen. iii. 7, 'They were naked,' that is, poor weak creatures, at the will of Satan, a subdued people, disarmed by their proud conqueror, and unable to make head against him. Indeed it cost Satan some dispute to make the first breach, but after that he had once the gates opened to let him in as conqueror into the heart of man, he plays the king; behold a troop of other sins crowd in after him, without any stroke or strife; instead of confessing their sins, they run their head in a bush, and by their good-will would not come where God is; and when they cannot flee from him, how do they prevaricate before him! They accuse one another, shifting the sin rather than suing for mercy. So quickly were their hearts hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. And this is the woeful condition of every son and daughter of Adam; naked he finds us, and slaves he makes us, till God, by his effectual call, delivers us from the power of Satan into the kingdom of his dear Son: which shall further appear, if we consider this Christless state in a fourfold notion.

First, It is a state of alienation from God, 'Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenant of promise,' Eph. ii. 12. Such a one hath no more to do with any covenant-promise, than he that lives at Rome has to do with the charter of London, which is the birthright of its own denizens, not of strangers. He is without God in the world; he can claim no more protection from God than an outlawed subject from his prince; if any mischief befals him, the mends is in his own hands, whereas God hath his hedge of special providence about his saints; and the devil, though his spite be most at them, dares not come upon God's ground to touch any of them without particular leave. Now what a deplored condition is that wherein a soul is left to the wide world, in the midst of legions of lusts and devils, to be rent and torn like a silly hare among a pack of hounds, and no God to call them off? Let God leave a people, though never so warlike, presently they lose their wits, cannot find their hands: a company of children or wounded men may rise up, and chase them out of their fenced cities, because God is not with them; which made Caleb and Joshua pacify the mutinous Israelites at the tidings of giants and walled cities, with this: 'They are bread for us, their defence is departed from them.' How much more must that soul be as bread to Satan, that hath no defence from the Almighty! Take men of the greatest parts, natural or acquired accomplishments, who only want an union with Christ, and renewing grace from Christ: O what fools doth the devil make of them! leading them at his pleasure, some to one lust some to another; the proudest of them all is slave to one or other, though it be to the ruining of body and soul for ever. Where lies the mystery, that men of such parts and wisdom should debase themselves to such drudgery work of hell? Even here, they are in a state of alienation from God, and no more able of themselves to break the devil's prison, than a slave to run from his chain.

Second, The Christless state is a state of ignorance, and such must needs be naked and unarmed. He that cannot see his enemy, how can he ward off the blow he sends? One seeing prophet leads a whole army of blind men whither he pleaseth. The imperfect knowledge saints have here, is Satan's advantage against them; he often takes them on the blind side; how easily then may he, with a parcel of good words, carry the blind soul out of his way, who knows not

Digitized by Google

a step of the right! Now, that the Christless state is a state of ignorance, see Eph. v. 8: 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.' Ye were darkness, not in the dark, so one that hath an eye may be. A child of light is often in the dark, concerning some truth or promise, but then hath a spiritual eye, which the Christless person wants, and so is darkness. And this darkness cannot be enlightened, but by its union with Christ, which is expressed in the following phrase, 'But now are ye light in the Lord.' As the eye of the body once put out, can never be restored by the creature's art, so neither can the spiritual eye, lost by Adam's sin, be restored by the teaching of men and angels. It is one of the diseases which Christ came to cure, Luke iv. 18. It is true, there is a light of reason, which is imparted to every man by nature, but this light is darkness, compared with the saints; as the night is dark to the day, even when the moon is in its full glory. This night-light of reason may save a person from some ditch, or pond, great and broad sins, but it will never help him to escape the more secret corruptions, which the saints see like atoms in the beams of spiritual knowledge. There is such curious work the creature is to do, which cannot be wrought by candlelight of natural knowledge. Nay more, where the common illumination of the spirit is superadded to this light of nature, yet that is darkness compared with the sanctifying knowledge of a renewed soul, which doth both discover spiritual truths, and warm the heart at the same time with the love of truth, having, like the sun, a prolifical and quickening virtue, which the other wants; so that the heart lies under such common illuminations, cold and dead. He hath no more strength to resist Satan, than if he knew not the command; whereas the Christian knowledge, even when taken prisoner by a temptation, pursues and brings back the soul, as Abraham his nephew out of the enemies' hand: which hints the third.

Third, The Christless state is a state of impotency, Rom. v. 'When we were without strength, Christ came to die for the ungodly.' What can a disarmed people, not having sword or gun, do to shake off the yoke of a conquering enemy? Such a power hath Satan over the soul, Luke xi. 21. He is called the strong man that keeps the soul as his palace: if he hath no disturbance from heaven, he need fear no mutiny within; he keeps all in peace there. What the Spirit of God doth in a saint, that in a manner doth Satan in a sinner. The Spirit fills the heart of his with love, joy, holy desires, fears; so Satan fills the sinner's heart with pride, lust, lying: 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart? saith Peter. And thus filled with Satan, (as the drunkard with wine), he is not his own man, but Satan's slave.

Fourth, The state of unregeneracy is a state of friendship with sin and Satan. If it be enmity against God (as it is) then friendship with Satan. Now it will be hard to make that soul fight in earnest against his friend. Is Satan divided? Will the devil within fight against the devil without; Satan in the heart, shut out Satan at the door? Sometimes indeed there appears a scuffle between Satan and a carnal heart; but it is a mere cheat, like the fighting of two fencers on a stage: you would think at first they were in earnest, but observing how wary they are, where they hit one another, you may soon know they do not mean to kill; and that which puts all out of doubt, when the prize is done, you shall see them making merry together, with what they have got of their spectators, which was all they fought for. When a carnal heart makes the greatest bustle against sin, by complaining of it, or praying against it, follow him but off the stage of duty (where he had gained the reputation of a saint, the prize he fights for), and you shall see them sit as friendly together in a corner as ever.

Use 1. This takes away the wonder off Satan's great conquests in the world: when we look abroad and see his vast empire, and what a little spot of ground contains Christ's subjects, what heaps of precious souls lie prostrate under this foot of pride, and what a little regiment of saints march under Christ's banner; perhaps the strangeness of the thing may make you ask, Is hell stronger than heaven? the arm of Satan more victorious than the cross of Christ? No such matter; consider this but one thing, and you will wonder that Christ hath any to follow him, rather than he hath so few. Satan finds the world unarmed; when the Prince of the World comes, he finds nothing to oppose; the whole soul is in a disposition to yield at first summons; and if conscience,

Digitized by Google

governor for God in the creature, stands out a while, all the other powers, as will and affections, are in a discontent (like mutinous soldiers in a garrison), who never rest till they have brought over conscience to yield, or against its command set open the city gate to the enemy, and so deliver traitorously their conscience prisoner to their lusts: but when Christ comes to demand the soul, he meets a scornful answer: 'Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of the Most High.' 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' With one consent they vote against him, and rise up as the Philistines against Samson, whom they called 'the destroyer of the country.' 'Ye will not come unto me,' saith Christ. O how true are poor sinners to the devil's trust! They will not deliver the castle they hold for Satan, till fired over their heads. Pharaoh opposeth Moses on one hand, and Israel cry out upon him on the other. Such measures hath Christ both at Satan's hand, and the sinner's. That which lessened Alexander's conquests, was, he overcame a people buried in barbarism, without arms, or discipline of war; and that which heightened Cæsar's (though not so many), he overcame a people more warlike and furnished. Satan's victories are of poor, ignorant, graceless souls, who have neither arms, nor hands, nor hearts to oppose; but when he assaults a saint, then he sits down before a city with gates and bars, and ever riseth with shame, unable to take the weakest hold, to pluck the weakest saint out of Christ's hands; but Christ brings souls out of his dominion with a high hand, in spite of all the force and fury of hell, which like Pharaoh and his host pursue them.

Use 2. This gives us a reason why the devil hath so great a spite against the gospel. Why? because this opens a magazine of arms and furniture for the soul; the word is that 'tower of David,' Cant. iv. 4, 'built for an armoury, wherein there hang a thousand bucklers, all the shields of mighty men.' Hence the saints have ever had their armour, and the preaching of the gospel unlocks it. As gospel-light ascends, so Satan's shady kingdom of darkness vanisheth, Rev. xiv. 16. There one angel comes forth to preach the everlasting gospel, and another angel follows at his back, ver. 8, crying 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen.' The very first charge the gospel gave to the kingdom of darkness, shook the foundations thereof, and put the legions of hell to the run. The seventy, whom Christ sent out, bring this speedy account of their ambassage: Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name; and Christ answers, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. As if he had said, It is no news you tell me, I beheld Satan fall when I sent you; I knew the gospel would make work where it came; and therefore no wonder Satan labours to dispossess the gospel, which dispossesseth him; he knows that army is near lost, whose magazine is blown up. It is true indeed, under the very gospel the devil rageth more in such swinish sinners as are given over of God to be possessed of that fiend, for rejecting of his grace; but he is cast out of others, who, before the loving-kindness of God to man appeared in the gospel, were commanded by him, serving divers lusts and pleasures; but now by the light of the gospel they see their folly, and by the grace it brings, are enabled to renounce him. This, this, is that which torments the foul spirit, to see himself forsaken of his old friends and servants, and this new Lord to come and take his subjects from him; and therefore he labours either by persecution to drive the gospel away, or by policy to persuade a people to send it away from their coasts; and was he ever more likely to effect it among us? What a low esteem hath he brought the preaching of the gospel into? The price is fallen above half, to what it was some years past, even among those that have been counted the greatest merchants upon the Saints' Exchange. Some, that have thought it worth crossing the seas, even to the Indies (almost as far as others fetch their gold), to enjoy the gospel, are loath now to cross the street to hear it at so cheap a rate; and some that come (who formerly trembled at it) make it most of their errand to mock at it, or quarrel with it. Nay, it is come to such a pass, that the word is so heavy a charge to the squeamish stomachs of many professors, that it comes up again presently, and abundance of choler with it against the preacher, especially if it fall foul of the sins and errors of the times, the very naming of which is enough to offend, though the nation be sinking under the weight. What reproaches are the faithful ministers of the gospel laden with? I call heaven

Digitized by Google

and earth to witness, whether ever they suffered a hotter persecution of the tongue, than in this apostatizing age. A new generation of professors are started up, that will not know them to be the ministers of Christ, though those before them (as well in grace, as time, more able to derive their spiritual pedigree than themselves) have to their death owned them for their spiritual fathers. And must not the ark needs shake, when they that carry it are thus struck at, both in their person and office? What are these men doing? Alas, they know not; 'Father, forgive them;' they are cutting off their right hand with their left; they are making themselves and the nation naked, by despising the gospel, and those that bring it.

Use 3. Consider your deplored estate, who are wholly naked and unarmed. Can you pity the beggar at your door (when you see such in a winter-day, shivering with naked backs, exposed to the fury of the cold); and not pity your own far more dismal soul-nakedness, by which thou liest open to heaven's wrath and hell's malice? Shall their nakedness cover them with shame, fill them with fear of perishing, which makes them with pitiful moans knock and cry for relief, as it is reported of Russia, where their poor (through extreme necessity) have this desperate manner of begging in the streets: 'Give me and cut me, give me and kill me!' And canst thou let Satan come and cut thy throat in thy bed of sloth, rather than accept of clothes to cover, yea, armour to defend thee? (I mean Christ and his grace, which in the gospel is tendered to you). And do not lightly believe your flattering hearts, if they shall tell you, you are provided of these already. I am afraid many a gaudy professor will be found as naked in regard of Christ, and truth of grace, as drunkards and swearers themselves: such there are, who content themselves with a Christ in profession, in gifts, and in duties, but seek not a Christ in solid grace, and so perish; those indeed are an ornament to the Christian, as the scarf and feather to the soldier, but these quench not the bullet in battle, it is Christ and his grace doth that, therefore labour to be sound rather than brave Christians. Grace embellished with gifts is the more beautiful, but these without grace, only the richer spoil for Satan.

The second branch of the first general part of the words follows; and that is, the quality or kind of that armour, the Christian is here directed to provide. It is not any trash will serve the turn, better none than not armour of proof, and none such, but armour of God. In a twofold respect, it must be of God. First, In institution and appointment; Secondly, In constitution.

CHAPTER II.

SHEWETH, THAT THE ARMOUR WE USE AGAINST SATAN, MUST BE DIVINE IN THE INSTITUTION, SUCH ONLY AS GOD APPOINTS.

Obs. First, the Christian's armour which he wears must be of divine institution and appointment. The soldier comes into the field with no arms, but what his general commands; it is not left to every one's fancy to bring what weapons he please, this will breed confusion. The Christian soldier is bound up to God's order; though the army be on earth, yet the council of war sits in heaven; this duty he shall do, that means ye shall use; and do more or use other than God commands, though with some seeming success against sin, such shall be surely called to an account for this boldness. The discipline of war among men is strict in this case. Some have suffered death by a council of war, even when they have beaten the enemy, because out of their place, or beside their order. God is very precise in this point; he will say to such as invent ways to worship of their own, and, coining means to mortify corruption, obtain comfort in their own mint: 'Who hath required that at your hands?' This is truly to be 'righteous over-much,' (as Solomon speaks) when we will pretend to correct God's law, and add supplements of our own to his rule. Who will pay that man his wages, that is not set on work by God? God tells Israel, the false prophets shall do them no good, because they come not of his errand, Jer. xxiii. 22. So neither will those ways and means help, which are not of God's appointing; God's thoughts are not as man's, nor his ways as ours, which he useth to attain his ends by. If man had been to set forth the Israelitish army, now to march out of Egypt, surely his wisdom would have

Digitized by Google

directed rather to have plundered the Egyptians of their horse and arms (as more necessary for such an expedition) than to borrow their jewels and ear-rings; but God will have them come out naked and on foot; and Moses keeps close to his order; yea, when horses were taken in battle, because God commanded they should be houghed, they obeyed, though to their seeming disadvantage. It was God's war they waged, and therefore but reasonable they should be under his command; they encamped and marched by his order, as the ark moved or rested; they fought by his command; the number appointed by him, the means and weapons they should use, all prescribed by God, as in the assault of Jericho; and what is the gospel of all this (for surely God hath an eye in that to our marching to heaven, and our fighting with these cursed spirits and lusts that stand in our way), but that we should fight lawfully, using those means which we have from his mouth in his word?

This reproveth two sorts.

Use 1. First, those that fight Satan in armour, that hath no divine institution, as,

First, the Papist. Look into his armoury, and hardly a piece that will be found armour of God. They fight in the Pope's armour; his authority is the shop wherein their weapons are forged; it were a kind of penance to your patience, to repeat all the several pieces of armour, with which they load silly souls, too heavy indeed for the broadest shoulders among them to bear; yea, more than the wiser sort of them mean to use; their masses, matins, vigils, pilgrimages, Lent-fasts, whippings, vows of chastity, poverty, with a world of such trash; where is a word of God for these? who hath required these things at their hands? A thousand woes will one day fall upon those impostors, who have stripped the people of the true armour of God, and put these reeds and bulrushes in their hands. This may justify us in the sight of God and men, for our departure from them, who will force us to venture the life of our souls in such paper armour, when God hath provided better.

Secondly, The carnal Protestant, who fights in fleshy armour, 2 Cor. x. 3. The apostle speaks there of 'warring after the flesh,' that is, with weapons or means, which man's carnal wisdom prompts to, and not God's commands, and so are weak. How few are clad with other in the day of battle! First, when Satan tempts to sin, if he hath not presently a peaceable entrance, yet the resistance commonly made is carnal; the strength carnal they rest on; their own, not God's; the motives carnal, as the fear of man more than of God. Where one saith, How shall I do this, and sin against God? many in their hearts say, How shall I do this, and anger man, displease my master, provoke my parents, and lose the good opinion of my minister? Herod feared John, and did many things; had he feared God, he would have laboured to have done every thing. The like may be said of all other motives, which have their spring in the creature, not in God; they are armour which will not outstand shot. If thy strength lie in a creature-lock, it may be soon cut off; if in God, it will hold, as his command. 'It is written:' I cannot do it, but I must set my foot on the law of my Maker. Or the love of Christ; I cannot come at my lust, but I must go over my bleeding Saviour; and therefore away, foul tempter! I hate thee and thy motion. This foundation is rock, and will stand; but if it be some carnal respect that balanceth thee, another more weighty may be found of the same kind, which will cast the scales another way. She that likes not the man because of his dress only, may soon be gained when he comes in another habit. Satan can change his suit, and then thy mouth will be stopped when thy carnal argument is taken off. Secondly, When the word or conscience rebuke for sin, what is the armour that men commonly cover their guilty souls withal? Truly no other than carnal. If they cannot evade the charge that these bring, then they labour to mitigate it, by extenuating the fact. It is true, will they say, I did (I confess) commit such a fault, but I was drawn in; 'The woman gave me, and I did eat,' was Adam's fig-leaf armour; it is but once or twice, and I hope that breaks no such squares? was this such a great business? I know jolly Christians will do as much as this comes to; I thank God, I cannot be charged for whore or thief: this is the armour which must keep off the blow. But if conscience will not be thus taken off, then they labour to divert their thoughts, by striking up

Digitized by Google

the loud music of carnal delights, that the noise of one may drown the other; or with Cain, they will go from the presence of the Lord, and come no more at those ordinances which make their head ache, and hinder the rest of their raving consciences. If yet the ghost haunts them, then they labour to pacify it with some good work or other, which they set against their bail; their alms and charity in their old age must expiate the oppression and violence of their former days; as if this little frankincense were enough to air and take away the plague of God's curse, which is in their ill-gotten goods. Thus poor creatures catch at any sorry covering, which will not so much as hide their shame, much less choke the bullet of God's wrath, when God shall fire upon them; this must be the armour of God's appointing. Adam was naked for all his fig-leaves, while God 'taught him to make coats of skin,' Gen. iii. 21, covertly (as some think) shadowing out Christ the true 'Lamb of God,' whose righteousness alone was appointed by him to cover our shame, and arm our naked souls from the sight and stroke of his justice.

Secondly, It reproves those who use the armour of God, but not as God hath appointed; which appears in three sorts.

First, When a person useth a duty appointed by God, not as armour of defence against sin, but as a cover for sin. Who would think him an enemy that wears Christ's colours in his hat, and marcheth after Christ in the exercise of all the duties of his worship? Such a one may pass all the courts of guard, without so much as being bid stand; all take him for a friend; and yet some such there are, who are fighting against Christ all the while. The hypocrite is the man: he learns his postures, gets the word, has his tongue tipped with scripture language, and walks in the habit of a Christian, merely on a design to drive his trade the more closely; like some highwaymen in our days, who rob in the habit of soldiers, that they may be the less suspected; this is desperate wickedness indeed, to take up God's arms, and use them in the devil's service; of all sinners such shall find the least mercy; false friends shall speed worse than open enemies.

Secondly, They use not the armour of God, as God hath appointed, who put a carnal confidence therein. We must not confide in the armour of God, but in the God of this armour, because all 'our weapons are only mighty through God,' 2 Cor. x. The ark was the means of the Jews' safety, but, carnally applauded and gloried in, hastened their overthrow; so duties and ordinances, gifts and graces, in their place, are means of the soul's defence; Satan trembles as much as the Philistines at the ark, to see a soul diligent in the use of duty and exercise of grace; but when the creature confides in them, this is dangerous. As some, when they have prayed, think they please God for all day, though they take little heed to their steps. Others have so good an opinion of their faith, sincerity, knowledge, that you may as soon make them believe they are dogs, as that they may ever be taken in such an error or sinful practice. Others, when assisted in duty, are prone to stroke their own head with a 'Bene fecisti, Bernarde,' and so promise themselves to speed, because they have done their errand so well. What speak such passages in the hearts of men, but a carnal confidence in their armour to their ruin? Many souls, we may safely say, do not only perish praying, repenting and believing after a sort, but they perish *by* their praying and repenting, &c., while they carnally trust in these. As it falls out sometimes, that the soldier in battle loseth his life by means of his own armour, it is so heavy he cannot flee with it, and so close buckled to him, that he cannot get it off, to flee for his life without it. If we be saved, we must come naked to Christ, for all our duties: we will not flee to Christ while confiding in them, and some are so locked into them, that they cannot come without them, and so in a day of temptation are trampled under the feet of God's wrath, and Satan's fury. The poor Publican throws down his arms (that is, all confidence in himself), cries out for quarter at the hands of mercy, 'God, be merciful unto me a sinner;' and he comes off with his life; he went away justified: but the Pharisee, laden with his righteousness, and conceited of it, stands to it, and is lost.

Thirdly, They do not use the armour of God as such, who, in the performing of divine duties, eye not God through them; and this makes them all weak and ineffectual. Then the word is mighty, when read as the word of God; then the gospel preached, powerful to convince the conscience, and revive the drooping spirit, when heard, as the appointment of the great God, and not the exer-

Digitized by Google

rise of a mean creature. Now it will appear in three things, whether we eye divine appointment in the means.

First, When we engage in a duty, and look not up to God for his blessing. Didst thou eye God's appointment in the means, thou wouldst say, 'Soul, if there come any good of thy present service, it must drop from heaven, for it is God's appointment, not man's, and can I profit, whether God will or no? or think to find and bring away any soul-enriching treasure from his ordinance without his leave? Had I not best look up to him, by whose blessing I live more than by my bread?

Again, Secondly, It appears we look not at God's appointment, when we have low thoughts of the means. What is Jordan, that I should wash in it? What is the preaching, that I should attend on it, where I hear nothing but what I know before? What are these beggarly elements of water, and bread, and wine? Are not these the reasonings of a soul that forgets who appoints these? Didst thou remember who commands, thou wouldst not question what the command is; what though it be clay, let Christ use it, and it shall open the eyes, though in itself more like to put them out. Hadst thou thine eye on God, thou wouldst silence thy carnal reason with this: It is God sends me to such a duty; whatever he saith unto me I will do it, though he should send me (as Christ them) to draw wine out of the pots filled with water.

Thirdly, When a soul leaves off a duty, because he finds not in it what he expected from it. O, saith the soul, I see it is in vain to follow the means as I have done; still Satan foils me; I will even give over. Dost thou remember, soul, it is God's appointment? Surely then thou wouldst persevere in the midst of discouragement. He that bids thee pray, bids thee pray without ceasing. He that bids thee hear, bids thee wait at the posts of wisdom. Thou wouldst reason thus, God hath set me on duty, and here I will stand, till God takes me off, and bids me leave praying.

CHAPTER III.

SHEWETH THAT THE ARMOUR WE USE FOR OUR DEFENCE AGAINST SATAN, MUST NOT ONLY BE DIVINE BY INSTITUTION, BUT CONSTITUTION ALSO.

SECONDLY, The Christian's armour must be armour of God, in regard of its make and constitution. My meaning is, it is not only God that must appoint the weapons and arms the Christian useth for his defence, but he must also be the efficient of them; he must work all their work in them and for them. Prayer is an appointment of God, yet this is not armour of proof, except it be a prayer of God flowing from His Spirit. Hope; that is the helmet the saint by command is to wear; but this hope must be God's creature, 'who hath begotten us to a lively hope,' 1 Pet. i. 3. Faith; that is another principal piece in the Christians furniture, but it must be 'the faith of God's elect,' Tit. i. 1. He is to take righteousness and holiness for his breast-plate; but it must be 'true holiness,' Eph. iv. 24. 'Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Thus, you see, it is not armour as armour, but as armour of God, that makes the soul impregnable. 'That which is born of God overcometh the world.' A faith born of God, a hope born of God; but the spurious, adulterous, brood of duties and graces, being begot of mortal seed, cannot be immortal.

Must the soul's armour be of God's make? Be exhorted then to look narrowly, whether the armour ye wear be the workmanship of God or no. There is abundance of false ware put off now-a-days; little good armour worn by the multitude of professors; it is Satan's after-game he plays, if he cannot please the sinner with his naked state of profaneness, then to put him off with something like grace, some slighty stuff that shall neither do him good nor Satan hurt; thus many, like children that cry for a knife or dagger, and are pleased as well with a bone knife and wooden dagger, as with the best of all; so they have some armour it matters not what. Pray they must, but little care how it be performed. Believe in God! Yes, they hope they are not infidels; but what it is, how they come by it, or whether it will hold in an evil day, this never was put to the question in their hearts. Thus thousands perish

Digitized by Google

with a vain conceit they are armed against Satan, death, and judgment, when they are 'miserable and naked,' yea, worse off than those who are more naked, those, I mean, who have not a rag of civility to hide their shame from the world's eye, and that in a double respect.

First, It is harder to work on such a soul savingly, because he hath a form, though not the power, and this affords him a plea. A soul purely naked, having nothing like the wedding garment on, he is speechless; the drunkard hath nothing to say for himself, when you ask him why he lives so swinishly; you may come up to him, and get within him, and turn the very mouth of his conscience upon him, which will shoot conviction into him. But to come to deal with one that prays and hears, one that is a pretender to hope and faith in God; here is a man in glistering armour; he hath his weapon in his hand, with which he will keep the preacher and the word he chargeth him with at arm's length. Who can say I am not a saint? What duty do I neglect? Here is a breastwork he lies under, which makes him not so fair a mark either to the observation or reproof of another, his chief defect being within, where man's eye comes not. Again, it is harder to work on him, because he hath been tampered with already, and miscarried in the essay. How comes such a one to be acquainted with such duties, to make such a profession? Was it ever thus? No, the word hath been at work upon him, his conscience hath scared him from his trade of wickedness into a form of profession; but taking in short of Christ for want of a thorough change, it is harder to remove him than the other; he is like a lock whose wards have been troubled, which makes it harder to turn the key, than if never pottered with. It is better dealing with a wild ragged colt, never backed, than one that in breaking hath taken a wrong stroke; a bone quite out of joint, than false set. In a word, such a one hath more to deny than a profane person; the one hath but his lusts, his swill and draught; but the other hath his duties, his seeming grace. O how hard it is to persuade such a one to alight, and hold Christ's stirrup, while he and his duties are made Christ's footstool.

Secondly, Such a one is deepest in condemnation. None sink so far into hell as those that come nearest heaven, because they fall from the greatest height. As it aggravates the torments of damned souls in this respect above devils, they had a cord of mercy thrown out to them, which devils had not; so by how much God by his Spirit waits on, pleads with, and by both gains on a soul more than others, by so much such a one, if he perish will find hell the hotter; these add to his sin, and the remembrance of his sin in hell thus accented, will add to his torment. None will have such a sad parting from Christ as those who went half way with him, and then left him. Therefore, I beseech you look, to your armour. David would not fight in armour he had not tried, though it was a king's; perhaps some thought him too nice. What! is not the king's armour good enough for David? Thus many will say, Art thou so curious and precise? Such a great man doth thus and thus, and hopes to come to heaven at last, and darest thou not venture thy soul in his armour? No Christian, follow not the example of the greatest on earth; it is thy own soul thou venturest in battle, therefore thou canst not be too choice of thy armour. Bring thy heart to the word, as the only touchstone of thy grace and furniture; the word, I told you, 'is the tower of David, 'from whence thy armour must be fetched; if thou canst find this tower-stamp on it, then it is of God, else not. Try it therefore by this one scripture-stamp. Those weapons are mighty which God gives his saints to fight his battles withal; 2 Cor. x. 4, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.' The sword of the Spirit hath its point and edge, whereby it makes its way into his heart and conscience, through the impenitency of the one, and stupidity of the other; (wherein Satan, as with buff and coat of mail, arms the sinner against God,) and there cuts and slashes, kills and mortifies lust in its own castle, where Satan thinks himself impregnable. The breast-plate, which is of God, doth not bend and break at every dart of temptation, but is of such a divine temperament, that it repels Satan's motions with scorn on Satan's teeth. Should such a one as I sin? as Nehemiah in another case? and such are all the rest. Now try whether your weapons be mighty or weak? what can you do or suffer more

Digitized by Google

for God than an hypocrite that is clad in fleshly armour? I will tell you what the world saith, and if you be Christians, clear yourselves, and wipe off that dirt which they throw upon your glistening armour; they say, These professors indeed have God more in their talk than we, they are oftener in the mount of duty than we; but when they come down into their shops, relations, or worldly employments, then the best of them all is but like one of us; they can throw the tables of God's commandments out of their hands as well as we; come from a sermon, and be as covetous and griping, as peevish and passionate, as the worst; they show as little love to Christ as others, when it is a matter of cost, as to relieve a poor saint, or maintain the gospel; you may get more from a stranger, an enemy, than from a professing brother. O Christians, either vindicate the name of Christ, whose ensign you seem to march after, or throw away your seeming armour, by which you have drawn the eyes of the world upon you. If you will not, Christ himself will cashier you, and that with shame enough, ere long. Never call that armour of God, which defends thee not against the power of Satan. Take, therefore, the several pieces of your armour and try them, as the soldier before he fights will set his helmet or headpiece as a mark, at which he lets fly a brace of bullets, and as he finds them, so will wear them or leave them: but be sure thou shootest Scripture bullets. Thou boastest of a breast-plate of righteousness; ask thy soul, Didst thou ever in thy life perform a duty to please God, and not to accommodate thyself? Thou hast prayed often against thy sin; a great noise of these pieces have been heard coming from thee by others, as if there were some hot fight between thee and thy corruption; but canst thou indeed show one sin that thou hast slain by all thy praying? Joseph was alive, though his coat was brought bloody to Jacob; and so may thy sins be, for all thy mortified look in duty, and outcry thou makest against them. If thou wouldest thus try every piece, thy credulous heart would not so easily be cheated with Satan's false ware.

Object. But is all armour that is of God thus mighty? We read of weak grace, little faith; how can this then be a trial of our armour, whether of God or not?

Ans. I answer, The weakness of grace is in respect of stronger grace; but that weak grace is strong and mighty in comparison of counterfeit grace. Now I do not bid thee try the truth of thy grace by such a power as is peculiar to stronger grace, but by that power which will distinguish it from false; true grace, when weakest, is stronger than false, when strongest. There is a principle of Divine life in it, which the other hath not. Now life, as it gives excellency (a flea, or fly, by reason of its life, is more excellent than the sun in all its glory), so it gives strength. The slow motion of a living man, though so feeble that he cannot go a furlong in a day, yet coming from life, imports more strength than is in a ship, which, though it sails swiftly, hath its motion from without. Thus possibly a hypocrite may exceed the true Christian in the bulk and outside of a duty, yet because his strength is not from life, but from some wind and tide abroad that carries him, and the Christian's is from an inward principle, therefore the Christian's weakness is stronger than the hypocrite in his greatest enlargements. I shall name but two acts of grace, when weakest, whereby the Christian exceeds the hypocrite in all his best array. You will say, then grace is at a weak stay indeed, when the Christian is persuaded to commit a sin, a great sin; such a one as possibly a carnal person would not have it said of him for a great matter, so low may the tide of grace fall; yet true grace at such an ebb, will appear of greater strength and force than the other.

First, This principle of grace will never leave, till the soul weeps bitterly with Peter, that it hath offended so good a God. Speak, O ye hypocrites! can you shew one tear that ever you shed in earnest for a wrong done to God? Possibly ye may weep to see the bed of sorrow which your sins are making for you in hell; but ye never loved God so well, as to mourn for the injury ye have done the name of God. It is a good gloss Augustine hath upon Esau's tears, Heb. xii., *Flevit quod perdidit, non quod vendidit.* He wept that he lost the blessing, not that he sold it. Thus we see the excellency of the saint's sorrow above the hypocrite's. The Christian, by his sorrow, shows himself a conqueror of that sin which even now overcame him; while the hypocrite, by

Digitized by Google

his pride, shows himself a slave to a worse lust than that he resists. While the Christian commits a sin, he hates it; whereas the other loves it while he forbears it.

Secondly, When true grace is under the foot of a temptation, yet then it will stir up in the heart a vehement desire of revenge, like a prisoner in his enemy's hand, who is thinking and plotting how to get out; and what he will do when out, waiting and longing every moment for his delivery, that he may again take up arms: 'O God, remember me,' saith Samson, 'this once, I pray thee, and strengthen me, that I may be at once avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes,' Judges xvi. 27. Thus prays the gracious soul, that God would but spare him a little, and strengthen him but once before he dies, that he may be avenged on his pride, unbelief, and those sins whereby he hath most dishonoured his God; but a false heart is so far from studying revenge, that he rather swells like the sea, against the law, which banks his lust in, and is angry with God, who hath made sin such a leap, that he must hazard his soul if he will have it.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE ENTIRENESS OF OUR FURNITURE; IT MUST BE THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

3. The third branch in the saint's furniture is, the entireness thereof, 'The whole armour of God.' The Christian's armour must be complete, and that in a threefold respect.

Section I. First, He must be armed in every part 'cap-a-pie,' soul and body, the powers of the one, and senses of the other, not any part left naked. A dart may fly in at a little hole (like that which brought a message of death to Ahab, through the joints of his harness), and Satan is such an archer, who can shoot at penny-breadth. If all the man be armed, and only the eye left without, Satan can soon shoot his fire-balls of lust in at that loop-hole, which shall set the whole house on a flame. Eve looked but on the tree, and a poisonous dart struck her to the heart. If the eye be shut, and the ear be open to corrupt communication, Satan will soon wriggle in at this hole; if all the outward senses be guarded, and the heart not kept with all diligence, he will soon by his own thoughts be betrayed into Satan's hands. Our enemies are on every side, and so must our armour be, 'on the right hand, and on the left,' 2 Cor. vi. 7. The apostle calls sin an enemy that surrounds us. If there be any part of the line unguarded, or weakly provided, there Satan falls on; we see the enemy often enter the city at one side, whilst he is beat back on the other, for want of care to keep the whole line. Satan divides his temptations into several squadrons; one he employs to assault here, another to storm there. We read of fleshly wickedness, and spiritual wickedness; whilst thou repellest Satan, tempting thee to fleshly wickedness, he may be entering thy city at the other gate of spiritual wickedness. Perhaps thou hast kept thy integrity in the practical part of thy life; but what armour hast thou to defend thy head, thy judgment? If he surprise thee here, corrupting that with some error, then thou wilt not long hold out in thy practice. He that could not get thee to profane the Sabbath among sensualists and atheists, will, under the disguise of such a corrupt principle as Christian liberty, prevail. Thus we see what need we have of universal armour, in regard of every part.

Section II. Secondly, The Christian must be in complete armour, in regard of the several pieces and weapons that make up the whole armour of God. Indeed there is a concatenation of graces, they hang together like links in a chain, stones in an arch, members in the body; prick one vein, and the blood of the whole body may run out at that sluice; neglect one duty, and no other will do us good. The Apostle Peter, in his second Epistle, chap. i. ver. 5—7, presseth the Christian to a joint endeavour to increase the whole body of grace; indeed that is health when the whole body thrives. 'Add,' saith he, to your faith virtue;' faith is the leading grace. Well, hast thou faith? add virtue: true faith is of a working, stirring nature; without good works it is dead or dying. *Fides pinguescit operibus.*—Luther. It is kept in plight and

Digitized by Google

heart by a holy life, as the flesh which plasters over the frame of man's body though it receive its heat from the vitals within, yet helps to preserve the very, life of those vitals; thus good works and gracious actions have their life from faith, yet are necessary helps to preserve the life of faith; thus we see sometimes the child nursing the parent that bare it, and therein performs but his duty. Thou art fruitful in good works, yet thou art not out of the devil's shot, except thou addest 'to thy virtue, knowledge.' This is the candle, without which, faith cannot see to do its work. Art thou going to give an alms? if it be not *oculata charitas*, if charity hath not this eye of knowledge to direct when, how, what, and to whom thou art to give, thou mayest at once wrong God, the person thou relievest, and thyself. Art thou humbling thyself for thy sin? for want of knowledge in the tenor of the gospel, Satan may play upon thy ignorance, and either persuade thee thou art not humbled enough, when God knows thou art almost drowned in thy tears, and even carried down by the impetuous torrent of thy sorrow, into despair; or else, shewing thee thy blubbered face, may flatter thee into a carnal confidence of thy humiliation. Perhaps thou seest the name of God dishonoured in the place where thou livest, and thy spirit is stirred within thee, as Paul at Athens; now if knowledge sits not in the saddle to rein and bridle in thy zeal, thou wilt be soon carried over hedge and ditch, till thou fallest into some precipice or other by thy irregular acting: neither is knowledge enough, except ye be armed with 'temperance,' which, I conceive, is that grace, whereby the Christian, as master of his own house, so orders his affections, like servants to reason and faith, that they do not irregularly move, or inordinately lash out into desires of, cares for, or joy in the creature comforts of this life, without which Satan will be too hard for thee. The historian tells us, that in one of the famous battles between the English and French, that which lost the French the day was a shower of English arrows, which did so gall their horse, as put the whole army into disorder; their horses knowing no ranks, did tread down their own men. The affections are but as the horse to the rider, on which knowledge should be mounted: if Satan's barbed arrows light on them, so that the desires of the creature prove unruly, and jostle with thy desires of Christ, thy care to keep thy credit or estate, put thy care to keep a good conscience to disorder; and thy carnal joy in wife and child trample down, or get before thy joy in the Lord; judge on which side victory is like to fall. Well, suppose thou marchest, provided thus far in goodly array, towards heaven, while thou art swimming in prosperity, must thou not also provide for foul way and weather; I mean, an afflicted estate? Satan will line the hedges with a thousand temptations, when thou comest into the narrow lanes of adversity, where thou canst not run from this sort of temptation, as in the campaign of prosperity. Possibly thou that didst escape the snare of an alluring world, mayest be dismounted by the same when it frowns; though repentance kept thee from being drunk with the sweet wines of those pleasures, yet for want of 'patience,' thou mayest be drunk with the wine of astonishment, which is in affliction's hand: therefore, saith the Apostle, 'to temperance, add patience;' either possess thyself in patience, or else some raving devil of discontent will possess thee. An impatient soul in affliction is a bedlamite in chains; yea, too like the devil in his chains, that rageth against God whilst he is fettered by him. Well, hast thou patience? an excellent grace indeed, but not enough; thou must be a pious man as well as a patient. Therefore, saith the Apostle, 'To patience add godliness.' There is an atheistical stupid patience, and there is a godly Christian patience: Satan benumbs the conscience of the one, and no wonder he complains not that feels not; but the Spirit of Christ sweetly calms the other, not by taking away the sense of pain, but by overcoming it with the sense of his love. Now godliness comprehends the whole worship of God, inward and outward. If thou art never so exact in thy morals, and not a worshipper of God, then thou art an atheist. If thou dost worship God, and that devoutly, but not by scripture rule, thou art an idolater. If according to the rule, but not in spirit and truth, then thou art an hypocrite, and so fallest into the devil's mouth. Or if thou dost give God one piece of his worship, and deniest another, still Satan comes to his market, Prov. xxviii. 9: 'He that turneth back his ear from hearing the law, his prayer is an abomination to the

Digitized by Google

Lord.' Yet, Christian, all thy armour is not on. Thy godliness indeed would suffice, wert thou to live in a world by thyself, or hadst nothing to do but immediate communion with God. But, Christian, thou must not always dwell on this mount of immediate worship; and when thou descendest, thou hast many brethren and servants to thy Father, who live with thee in the same family; and thou must comport thyself becomingly, or else thy Father will be angry. First, thou hast brethren, heirs of the same promise with thee; therefore you must add to holiness 'brotherly kindness.' If Satan can set you at odds, he gives a deep wound to your godliness. You will hardly join hearts in a duty, that cannot join hands in love. Secondly, There are not only brethren, but servants, a multitude of profane carnal ones, who, though they never had the names of sons and daughters, yet retain to God's family, and thy heavenly Father will have thee walk unblamably, yea, winningly to those that are without; which that thou mayest do, thou must add to brotherly kindness, 'charity;' by which grace thou shalt be willing to do good to the worst of men: when they curse thee, thou must pray for them; yea, pray for no less than a Christ, a heaven for them. 'Father, forgive them,' said Christ, while they were shedding his heart's blood. And truly I am persuaded the want of this last piece of armour hath given Satan great advantage in these our times. We are so afraid our charity should be too broad, whereas in this sense, if it be not as wide as the world, it is too strait for the command which bids us 'do good to all.' May not we ministers be charged with the want of this? when the strain of our preaching is solely directed to the saints, and no pains taken in rescuing poor captived souls, yet uncalled, out of the devil's clutches, who may haul them to hell without any disturbance, while we are comforting the saints, and preaching their privileges; but in the mean time let the ignorant be ignorant still, and the profane profane still, for want of a compassionate charity to their souls, which would excite us to the reproving and exhorting of them, that they might also be brought into the way of life, as well as the saints encouraged, who are walking therein. We are stewards to provide bread for the Lord's house; the greatest part of our hearers cannot, must not have the children's bread, and shall we therefore give them no portion at all? Christ's charity pitied the multitude, to whom in his public preaching he made special application, as in that famous sermon, most part of which is spent in rousing up the sleepy consciences of the hypocritical Pharisees, by those thunder-claps of woes and curses so often denounced against them, Matt. xxiii. Again, how great advantage hath Satan from the want of this charity in our families! Is it not observed how little care is taken by professing governors of such societies, for the instructing their youth? Nay, it is a principle which some have drank in, that it is not their duty. O where is their charity in the mean time, when they can see Satan come within their own walls, and let him drive a child, a servant, in their own ignorance and profaneness to hell, and not so much as sally out upon his enemy by a word of reproof or instruction, to rescue their silly souls out of the murderer's hands? We must leave them to their liberty forsooth, and that is as fair play as we can give the devil; give but corrupt nature enough of this rope, and it will soon strangle the very principles of God and religion in their tender years.

Section III. Thirdly, The entireness of the saint's armour may be taken not only for every part and piece of the saint's furniture, but for the completeness and perfection of every piece. As the Christian is to endeavour after every grace, so is he to press after the advance and increase of every grace, even to perfection itself; as he is to add to his faith virtue, so is he to add faith to faith; he is ever to be completing of his grace. It is that which is frequently pressed upon believers, Matt. v. 48, 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. And purify yourselves as God is pure;' where we have an exact copy set, not as if we could equalize that purity and perfection which is in God, but to make us strive the more, when we shall see how infinitely short we fall of our copy when we write the fairest hand. So James i. 3: 'Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be entire, wanting nothing, or wanting in nothing. Thou who makest a hard shift to carry a little burden with thy little patience, wouldst sink under a greater; therefore there is need that patience should be ever perfecting, lest at last we meet a burden too heavy for our weak

Digitized by Google

shoulders. Take a few reasons why the Christian should be thus completing of his grace.

First, Because grace is subject to decays, and it ever needs completing; as in an army, especially, which often engageth in battle, their arms are battered and broken; one man hath his helmet bent, another his sword gapped, a third his pistol unfixed; and therefore recruits are ever necessary. In one temptation, the Christian hath his helmet of hope beaten off his head, in another his patience hard put to it. The Christian had need have an armour-shop at hand to make up his loss, and that speedily, for Satan is most like to fall on, when the Christian is less prepared to receive his charge. 'Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to sift you;' he knew they were at that time weakly provided, Christ their captain now to be taken from the head of their troop, discontents among themselves, striving who should be greatest, and their recruits of stronger grace, which the Spirit was to bring, not yet come. Now he hath a design to surprise them, and therefore Christ, carefully to prevent him, promiseth speedy to despatch his Spirit for their supply, Acts i. 4, and in the meantime sends them to Jerusalem, to stand as it were in a body in their joint supplications, upon their guard, while he comes to their relief; shewing us in the weakness of our graces what to do, and whither to go for supply.

Secondly, Because Satan is completing his skill and wrath. It is not for nought that he is called the old serpent, subtle by nature, but more by experience; wrathful by nature, yet every day more and more enraged; like a bull, the longer he is baited, the more fury he shews. And therefore we who are to grapple with him, now his time is so short, had need come well appointed into the field.

Thirdly, It is the end of all God's dispensations, to complete his saints in their graces and comforts. Wherefore doth he lop and prune by afflictions, but to 'purge, that they may bring forth more fruit?' John xv. 2, (that is, fuller and fairer.) 'Tribulation works patience,' Rom. v. 3. It is God's appointment for that end. 'It works,' that is, it increaseth the saint's patience; it enrageth indeed the wicked, but meekens the saints. It is his design in the gospel preached, to carry on his saints 'from faith to faith,' Rom. i. 17. And accordingly he hath furnished the church with instruments, and those with gifts, 'for the perfecting of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph. iv. 14. Wherefore doth the scaffold stand, and the workman on it, if the buildings go not up? For us not to advance under such means, is to make void the counsel of God. Therefore the Apostle blames the Christian Jews, Heb. v. 12, for their non-proficiency in the school of Christ: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.'

Use. O, how few are there who endeavour thus to improve in their spiritual state, and labour to perfect what is yet lacking in their knowledge, patience, and the rest! First, Tell some of adding faith to faith, one degree of grace to another, and you shall find they have more mind to join house to house and lay field to field; their souls are athirst, ever gaping for more, but of what? not of Christ, or heaven; it is earth; earth they never think they have enough of, till death comes and stops their mouths with a shovelful digged out of their own grave! What a tormenting life must they needs have, who are always crying for more weight, and ye cannot press their covetous desires to death? O sirs, the only way (if men would believe it) to quench this thirst to the creature, were to enkindle another after Christ and heaven. Get but a large heart vehemently thirsting after these, and the other will die alone; as the feverish thirst doth when nature comes to her temper. Secondly, Others labour not thus to perfect grace, because they have a conceit they are perfect already, and upon this fancy throw away praying, hearing, and all other ordinances, as strings for those babes in grace to be carried by, who are not arrived to their high attainments. O what fools does pride make men! Truly heaven were no such desirable place, if we should be no more perfect than thus; a sort of people that are too high for this world, and too low for another. The way by which God cures this frenzy of pride, we have in these days seen to be something

Digitized by Google

like that in Nebuchadnezzar, to give them the heart of a beast; I mean, for a time, suffer them to fall into beastly practices, by which he shows them how far they are from that perfection they dreamed of so vainly. Thirdly, Others who have true grace, and desire the advancement of it, yet are discouraged in their endeavour for more, from too deep a sense of their present penury. Bid some such labour to get more power over corruption, more faith in, and love to God, that they may be able to do the will of God cheerfully, and suffer it in the greatest afflictions patiently, yea, thankfully, and they will never believe, that they, whose faith is so weak, and love so chill, and stock so little in hand, should ever attain to anything like such a pitch. You may as well persuade a beggar with one poor penny in his purse, that if he will go and trade with that, he shall come to be Lord Mayor of London before he die. But why, poor hearts, should you thus despise the day of small things? Do you not see a little grain of mustard-seed spread into a tree, and weak grace compared to it for its growth at last, as well as littleness at first? Darest thou say thou hast no grace at all? If thou hast but any, (though the least that ever any had to begin with,) I dare tell thee that he hath done more for thee in that, than he should in making that which is now so weak, as perfect as the saint's grace is now in heaven. First, He hath done more, considering it as an act of power. There is a greater gulf between no grace and grace, than between weak grace and strong; between a chaos and nothing, than between a chaos and this beautiful frame of heaven and earth. The first day's work of both creations is the greatest. Secondly, Consider it as an act of grace; it is a greater mercy to give the first grace of conversion, than to crown that with glory. It is more grace and condescent in a prince to marry a poor damsel, than, having married her, to clothe her like a princess; he was free to do the first or not; but his relation to her pleads strongly for the other. God might have chosen whether he would have given thee grace or no, but having done this, thy relation to him and his covenant also do oblige him to add more and more, till he hath fitted thee as a bride for himself in glory.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE USE OF OUR SPIRITUAL ARMOUR, OR THE EXERCISE OF GRACE.

THE fourth and last branch in the saint's furniture is, the use they are to make thereof: 'Put on the whole armour of God.' Briefly, what is this duty, 'Put on?' These being saints (many of them at least) he writes to, it is not only putting on by conversion, what some of them might not yet have; but also, he means they should exercise what they have. It is one thing to have armour in the house, and another thing to have it buckled on; to have grace in the principle, and grace in the act. So that the instruction will be,

Doct. It is not enough to have grace, but this grace must be kept in exercise. The Christian armour is made to be worn; no laying down, or putting off our armour, till we have done our warfare, and finished our course. Our armour and our garments of flesh go off together; then indeed will be no need of watch and ward, shield or helmet. Those military duties and field graces, (as I may call faith, hope, and the rest,) they shall be honourably discharged. In heaven we shall appear, not in armour, but in robes of glory; but here they are to be worn night and day; we must walk, work, and sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ. This Paul professeth to endeavour, Acts xxiv. 16: 'Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.' Here we have this holy man at his arms, training and exercising himself in his postures, like some soldier by himself handling his pike, and inuring himself before the battle. Now the reason of this is,

SECTION I. First, Christ commands us to have our armour on, our grace in exercise, Luke xii. 35: 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.' Christ speaks either in a martial phrase, as to soldiers, or in a domestic, as to servants: if as to soldiers, then let your loins be girded,

Digitized by Google

and your lights burning, is that we should be ready for a march, having our armour on (for the belt goes over all), and our matchlight ready to give fire at the first alarm of temptation. If as to servants, which seems more natural, then he bids us (as our master that is gone abroad), not through sloth or sleep put off our clothes, and put out our lights, but stand ready to open when he shall come, though at midnight. It is not fit the master should stand at the door knocking, and the servant within sleeping; indeed, there is no duty the Christian hath in charge but implies this daily exercise, 'Pray;' but how? 'without ceasing.' 'Rejoice;' but when? 'evermore.' 'Give thanks;' for what? 'in everything,' 1 Thess. v. 16, 17. The shield of faith, and helmet of hope, we must hold them to the end, 1 Pet. i. 13. The sum of all which is, that we should walk in the constant exercise of these duties and graces. Where the soldier is placed, there he stands, and must neither stir nor sleep till he be brought off. When Christ comes, that soul shall only have his blessing whom 'he finds so doing.'

Secondly, Satan's advantage is great when grace is not in exercise. When the devil found Christ so ready to receive his charge, and repel his temptation, he soon had enough; it is said, 'He departed for a season,' Luke iv. 13; as if in his shameful retreat he had comforted himself with hopes of surprising Christ unawares, at another season more advantageous to his design; and we find him coming again, in the most likely time indeed to have attained his end, had his enemy been man, and not God. Now, if this bold fiend did thus watch and observe Christ from time to time, doth it not behove thee to look about thee, lest he take thy grace at one time or other napping? what he misseth now by thy watchfulness, he may gain anon by thy negligence. Indeed, he hopes thou wilt be tired out with continual duty: Surely, saith Satan (when he sees the Christian up, and fervent in duty), this will not hold long. When he finds him tender of conscience, and scrupulous of occasion to sin, this is but for a while; ere long I shall have him unbend his bow, and unbuckle his armour, and then have at him. Satan knows what ord s thou keepest in thy house and closet; and though he hath not a key to thy heart, yet he can stand in the next room to it, and lightly hear what is whispered there. He hunts the Christian by the scent of his own feet, and if once he doth but smell which way thy heart inclines, he knows how to take the hint; if but one door be unbolted, one work unarmed, one grace off its carriage, here is advantage enough.

Thirdly, Because it is so awkward a business, and hard a work, to recover the activity of grace once lost, and to revive a duty in disuse; 'I have put off my coat,' saith the spouse, Cant. v. 3. She had given way to a lazy distemper, was laid upon her bed of sloth, and how hard is it to raise her? Her beloved is at the door, beseeching her by all the means of love, which might bring to her remembrance the near relation between them; 'My sister, my love, my dove, open to me;' and yet she riseth not. He tells her, 'His locks are filled with the drops of the night; yet she stirs not. What is the matter? Her coat was off, and she is loth to put it on; she had given way to her sloth, and now she knows not how to shake it off; she could have been glad to have her beloved's company, if himself would have opened the door; and he desired as much her's, if she would rise to let him in; and upon these terms they part. The longer a soul hath neglected duty, the more ado there is to get it taken up; partly through shame, the soul having played the truant, now knows not how to look God on the face; and partly from the difficulty of the work, being double to what another finds, that walks in the exercise of his grace: here is all out of order, It requires more time and pains for him to tune his instrument, than for another to play the lesson. He goes to duty as to a new work, as a scholar that hath not looked on his book some while; his lesson is almost out of his head; whereas another that was but even now conning it over, hath it *ad unguem*. Perhaps it is an affliction thou art called to bear, and thy patience unexercised; little or no thoughts thou hast had for such a time (while thou wert frisking in a full pasture), and now thou kickest and flingest, even 'as a bullock, unaccustomed to the yoke,' Jer. xxxi. 18; whereas another goes meekly and patiently under the like cross, because he had been stirring up his patience, and fitting the yoke to his neck. You know what a confusion there

Digitized by Google

is in a town, at some sudden alarm in the dead of the night, the enemy at the gates, and they asleep within. O what a cry is there heard! one wants his clothes, another his sword, a third knows not what to do for powder; thus in a fright they run up and down, which would not be if the enemy did find them upon their guard, orderly waiting for his approach. Such a hubbub there is in a soul that keeps not his armour on, this piece and that will be to seek when he should use it.

Fourthly, We must keep grace in exercise in respect of others, our fellow-soldiers. Paul had this in his eye, when he was exercising himself to keep a good conscience, that he might not be a scandal to others. The cowardice of one may make others run; the ignorance of one soldier that hath not skill to handle his arms may do mischief to his fellow soldiers about him; some have shot their friends for their enemies; the unwise walking of one professor makes many others fare the worse. But say, thou dost not fall so far as to become a scandal, yet thou canst not be so helpful to thy fellow-brethren as thou shouldst. God commanded the Reubenites and Gadites to go before their brethren ready armed, until the land was conquered. Thus, Christian, thou art to be helpful to thy fellow-brethren, who have not, it may be, that settlement of peace in their spirit as thyself, not that measure of grace or comfort; thou art to help such weak ones, and go before them, as it were, armed for their defence: now if thy grace be not exercised, thou art so far unserviceable to thy weak brother. Perhaps thou art a master or parent who hast a family under thy wing, they fare as thou thrivest; if thy heart be in a holy frame, they fare the better in the duties thou performest; if thy heart be dead and down, they are losers by the hand. So that as the nurse eats the more for the babe's sake she suckles, so shouldst thou for their sake, who are under thy tuition, be more careful to exercise thy own grace and cherish it.

SECTION II.—*Object.* O but, may some say, this is a hard work indeed, our armour never off, our grace always in exercise. Did God ever mean religion should be such a toilsome business as this would make it?

Ans. Thou speakest like one of the foolish world, and shewest thyself a mere stranger to the Christian's life that speakest thus. A burden to exercise grace! why, it is no burden to exercise the acts of nature, to eat, to drink, to walk,—all delightful to us in our right temper; if any of these be otherwise, nature is oppressed; if stuffed, then difficult to breathe; if sick, then the meat offensive we eat: so take a saint in his right temper, it is his joy to be employed in the exercise of his grace in this or that duty, Ps. cxxii. 1: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord,' his heart leaped at the motion. When any occasion diverts him from communion with God, though he likes it never so well, yet it is unwelcome and unpleasing to him; as you who are used to be in your shops from morning to night, how tedious is it for you to be abroad some days, though among good friends, because you are not where your work and calling lies? A Christian in duty is one in his calling, as it were in his shop where he should be, yea, where he would be, and therefore far from being tedious. Religion is so burdensome to none, as to those who are infrequent in the exercise of it. Use makes heavy things light; we hardly feel the weight of our clothes, because fitted to us and worn daily by us; whereas the same weight on our shoulder would trouble us. Thus the grievousness of religious duties to carnal ones, is taken away in the saints, partly by the fitness of them to the saints' principles, as also by their daily exercise in them. The disciples, when newly entered into the ways of Christ, could not pray much, or fast long; the bottles were new, and that wine too strong; but by that they had walked a few years, they grew mighty in both. Dost thou complain that heaven's way is rugged? Be the more frequently walking in it, and that will make it smooth.

But Secondly, Were this constant exercise of grace more troublesome to the flesh, (which is the only complainer,) the sweet advantage that accrues by this to the Christian will abundantly recompense all his labour and pains.

First, The exercise of thy grace will increase thy grace; 'The diligent hand makes rich.' A provident man counts that lost which might have been got, not only when his money is stole out of his chest, but when it lies there unimproved.

Digitized by Google

Such a commodity, saith the tradesman, if I had bought with that money in my bags, would have brought me in so much gain, which is now lost; so the Christian may say, My dawning knowledge, had I followed on to know the Lord, might have spread to broad day: 'I have more understanding,' saith David, 'than all my teachers.' How came he by it? He will tell you in the next words: 'For thy testimonies are my meditation,' Ps. cxix. 99. He was more in the exercise of duty and grace. The best wits are not always the greatest scholars, because their study is not suitable to their parts; neither always proves he the richest man, that sets up with the greatest stock. A little grace, well husbanded by daily exercise, will increase, when greater, neglected, shall decay.

Secondly, As exercise increaseth, so it evidenceth grace. Would a man know whether he be lame or no? let him rise; he will be sooner satisfied by one turn in a room, than by a long dispute, and he sit still. Wouldst thou know whether thou lovest God? be frequent in exerting acts of love; the more the fire is blown up, the sooner it is seen; and so of all other graces. Sometimes the soul is questioning whether it hath any patience, any faith, till God comes and puts him into an afflicted estate, (where he must either exercise this grace or perish,) and then it appears like one that thinks he cannot swim, yet being thrown into the river, then summoning all his strength, he makes a shift to swim to land, and sees what he can do. How oft have we heard Christians say, I thought I could never have endured such a pain, trusted God in such a strait; but now God had taught me what he can do for me, what he hath wrought in me? And this thou mightst have known before, if thou wouldst have often stirred up and exercised thy grace.

Thirdly, Exercise of grace doth invite God to communicate himself to such a soul. God sets the Christian at work, and then meets him in it. 'Up and be doing, and the Lord be with you.' He sets a soul a reading as the eunuch, and then joins to his chariot; a praying, and then comes the messenger from heaven: 'O, Daniel, greatly beloved!' The spouse who lost her beloved 'on her bed,' finds him as she comes from the sermon. Cant. iii. 4: 'It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth.'

Section III.—*Use* 1. This falls heavy on their heads, who are so far from exercising grace, that they walk in the exercise of their lust; their hearts are like a glass-house, the fire is never out, the shop-windows never shut; they are always at work, hammering some wicked project or other upon the anvil of their hearts: there are some who give scope to their lusts; what their wretched hearts will, they will have; they pamper their lusts, as some their children, deny them nothing, who, as it is recorded of David to Adonijah, do not so much as say to their souls, Why dost thou so? Why art thou so proud, so covetous, so profane? They spend their days in making provision for these guests; as at some inns, the house never cools, but as one guest goes out, another comes in; as one lust is served, another is calling for attendance. As some exercise grace more than others, so there are greater traders in sin, that set more a-work than others, and return more wrath in a day than others in a month. Happy are such (in comparison of these who are chained up by God's restraint upon their outward man or inward, that they cannot drive on so furiously as these, who, by health of body, power, and greatness in place, riches and treasures in their coffers, numbness and searedness in their consciences, are hurried on to fill up the measure of their sins. We read of the Assyrian, that he 'enlarged his heart as hell,' stretching out his desires as men do their bags, that are bursting with money, to hold more. Hab. ii. 5. Thus the adulterer, as if his body were not quick enough to execute the commands of his lust, stirs it up by sending forth his armorous glances, which come home laden with adultery, blows up this fire with unchaste sonnets and luxury, proper fuel for the devil's kitchen; and the malicious man, who, that he may lose no time from his lust, is a tearing his neighbour in pieces as he lies on his bed, cannot sleep unless some such bloody sacrifice be offered to his raving lust. O how may this shame the saints! How oft is your zeal so hot, that you cannot sleep till your hearts have been in heaven, as you are on

Digitized by Google

your beds, and there pacified with the sight of your dear Saviour, and some embraces of love from him!

Use 2. It reproves those who flout and mock at the saints, while exercising their graces; none so jeered as the saint in his calling. Men may work in their shops, and every one follow his calling, as diligently as they please, and no wonder made of this by those that pass by in the streets; but let the Christian be seen at work for God, in the exercise of any duty or grace, and he is hooted at, despised, yea, hated. Few so bad indeed, but seem to like religion in the notion; they can commend a sermon of holiness, like a discourse of God or Christ, in the pulpit; but when these are really set before their eyes, as they sparkle in a saint's conversation, they are very contemptible and hateful to them; this living and walking holiness bites; and though they liked the preacher's art, in painting forth the same in his discourse, yet now they run from them, and spit at them; this exercise of grace offends the profane heart, and stirs up the enmity that lies within; as Michal, she could not but flout David, to see him dancing before the ark. He that commended the preacher for making a learned discourse of zeal, will rail on a saint expressing an act of zeal in his place and calling; now grace comes too near him. A naughty heart must stand at some distance from holiness, that the beams thereof may not bear too strongly on his conscience, and so he likes it. Thus the pharisees the prophets of old, these were holy men in their account, and they can lavish out their money on their tombs in honour of them; but Christ, who was more than all of them, he is scorned and hated. What is the mystery of this? The reason was, these prophets are off the stage, and Christ on. *Pascitur in vivis livor, post fata quiescit.*

Use 3. Try by this whether you have grace or no; dost thou walk in the exercise of thy grace? He that hath clothes, surely will wear them, and not be seen naked. Men talk of their faith, repentance, love to God; these are precious graces, but why do they not let us see these walking abroad in their daily conversation? Surely if such guests were in thy soul, they would look out sometimes at the window, and be seen abroad in this duty, and that holy action; grace is of a stirring nature, and not such a dead thing, like an image, which you may lock up in a chest, and none shall know what God you worship, no, grace will show itself; it will walk with you in all places and companies; it will buy with you and sell for you; it will have a hand in all your enterprises; it will comfort you when you are sincere and faithful for God, and it will complain and chide you when you are otherwise; go to, stop its mouth, and heaven shall hear its voice; it will groan, mourn, and strive, even as a living man, when you would smother him. I will as soon believe the man to be alive, that lies peaceably as he is nailed up in his coffin, without strife or bustle, as that thou hast grace, and never exercise it in any act of spiritual life. What, man, hast thou grace, and carried so peaceably, as a fool to the stocks, by thy lust? Why hangest thou there nailed to thy lust? If thou hast grace, come down, and we will believe it; but if thou art such a tame slave, as to sit still under the command of lust, thou deceivest thyself. Hast thou grace, and show none of it in thy condition thou art placed in? May be thou art rich; dost thou show thy humility towards those that are beneath thee? Dost thou show a heavenly mind, breathing after heaven more than earth? It may be thy heart is puffed with thy estate, that thou lookest on the poor as creatures of some lower species than thyself, and disdainest them; and as for heaven, thou thinkest not of it. Like that wicked prince that said, 'He would lose his part in Paradise rather than in Paris.' Art thou poor? Why dost not exercise grace in that condition? Art thou contented, diligent? May be, instead of contentment, thou repinest? canst not see a fair lace on thy rich brother's cloth but grudgest it, instead of concurring with providence by diligence to supply thy wants? Thou art ready to break through the hedge into thy neighbour's fair pasture, thus serving thy own turn by a sin, rather than waiting for God's blessing on thy honest diligence; if so, be not angry; we call thee by thy right name, or at least question whether we may style thee Christian, whose carriage is so cross to that sacred name, which is too holy to be written on a rotten post.

Digitized by Google

Use 4. Be exhorted, O ye saints of God, to walk in the exercise of grace. It is the minister's duty, with the continual breath of exhortation, and if need be, reproof, to keep this heavenly fire clear on the saints' altar. Peter saw it necessary to have bellows always in his hands: 2 Peter i. 12, 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of those things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth' (that shall not take him off); as long as he is in this tabernacle, he saith he will stir them up, and be putting 'them in remembrance,' ver. 13. There is a sleepy disease we are subject to in this life; Christ, though he had roused up his disciples twice, yet takes them napping the third time. Either exercise thy grace, or Satan will act thy corruption; as one bucket goes down the other rises; there is a body of sin within, which, like a malignant party, watcheth for such a time to step into the saddle; and it is easier to keep them down, than to pull them down. Thy time is short, and thy way long; thou hadst best put on, lest thou meanest to be overtaken with night, before thou gettest within sight of thy Father's house. How uncomfortable it is for a traveller in heaven-road (above all other) to go potching in the dark, many can with aching hearts tell thee. And what hast thou here to mind like this? Are they worldly cares and pleasures? Is it wisdom to lay out so much cost on thy tenement, which thou art leaving, and forget what thou must carry with thee? Before the fruit of these be ripe which thou art now planting, thyself may be rotting in the grave: 'Time is short,' saith the apostle, 1 Cor. vii. 29. The world is near its port, and therefore God hath contracted the sails of man's life but a while, and there will not be a point to choose whether we had wives or not, riches or not; but there will be a vast difference between those that had grace, and those that had not; yea, between those that did drive a quick trade in the exercise thereof, and those that were more remiss; the one shall have an 'abundant entrance into glory,' 2 Peter i. 11, while the other shall suffer loss in much of his lading, which shall be cast over-board as merchandise that will bear no price in that heavenly country; yea, while thou art here, others shall fare the better by thy lively graces. Thy cheerfulness and activity in thy heavenly course will help others that travel with thee; he is dull indeed that will not put on, when he sees so much metal for God in thee who leadest the way. Yea, thy grace will give a check to the sins of others, who never stand in such awe as when grace comes forth and sits like a ruler in the gate, to be seen of all that pass by. The swearer knows not such majesty is present when the Christian is mealy-mouthed, and so goes on and fears no colours; whose grace, had it but her dagger of zeal ready, and courage to draw it forth in a wise reproof, would make sin quit the place, and with shame run into its hole; Job xxix. 8, 'The young men saw me, and hid themselves; the princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth.' And doth not God deserve the best service thou canst do him in thy generation? Did he give thee grace to lay it up in a dead stock, and none to be the better? or can you say, that he is wanting to you in his love and mercy? Are they not ever in exercise for your good? Is the eye of Providence ever shut? No, 'He slumbers not' that keeps thee. Or is it one moment off thee? No, 'The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous;' he hath fixed it for ever, and with infinite delight, pleased himself in the object. When was his ear shut, or his hand either, from receiving thy cries, or supplying thy wants? nay, doth not thy condition take up the thoughts of God, and are they any other than thoughts of peace which he entertains? A few drops of this oil will keep the wheel in motion.

---

* *That ye may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil.*

THESE words present us with the reason why the Christian soldier is to be thus completely armed; 'That ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.' The strength of which argument lies in these two particulars.

First, The danger, if unarmed; the enemy is no mean, contemptible one; no less than the devil, set out as a cunning engineer by his wiles and stratagems.

Secondly, The certainty of standing against all his wits and wiles, if we be

Digitized by Google

thus armed, 'That ye may be able to stand.' As no standing without armour, so no fear of falling into the fiend's hands, if armed.

To begin with the first, the saint's enemy, the devil, described by his wiles; properly the methods of Satan, which signifies, that art and order one observes in handling a point; we say, such a one is methodical. Now, because it shews ingenuity and acuteness of wit so to compose a discourse, therefore it is transferred to express the subtilty of Satan in laying of his plots and stratagems, in his warlike preparations against the Christian. Indeed, the expert soldier hath his order as well as the scholar; there is method in forming of an army, as well as framing an argument. The note which lies before us is,

Doct. The devil is a very subtle enemy. The Christian is endangered most by his policy and craft; he is called the old serpent. The serpent, subtle above other creatures, an old serpent above other serpents; Satan was too crafty for man in his perfection, much more now in his maimed estate, having never recovered that first damage he got in his understanding by the fall of Adam. And as man hath lost, so Satan hath gained more and more experience; he lost his wisdom indeed as soon as he became a devil, but ever since he hath increased his craft; though he hath not wisdom enough to do himself good, yet subtilty enough to do others hurt. God shews us where his strength lies, when he promiseth he will 'bruise the head of the serpent;' his head crushed, and he dies presently. Now, in handling this point of Satan's subtility, we shall consider him in his two main designs, and therein shew you his wiles and policies. His first main design is, to draw into sin. The second is to accuse, vex, and trouble the saint for sin. First, Let us consider the devil as a tempter to sin, and there he shews his wily subtilty in three things.

First, In choosing the most advantageous season for tempting.

Secondly, In managing his temptations, laying them in such a method and form, as shews his craft.

Thirdly, In pitching on fit instruments for his turn, to carry on his design.

CHAPTER I.

OF SATAN'S SUBTILTY TO CHOOSE OUT THE MOST ADVANTAGEOUS SEASONS FOR TEMPTING.

First, he shews his subtilty, in choosing the most proper and advantageous seasons for tempting. 'To every thing there is a season,' Solomon saith, Eccles. iii. 1; that is, a nick of time, which taken, gives facility and speedy despatch to a business: and therefore the same wise man gives this reason, why man miscarries so frequently, and is disappointed in his enterprises, 'because he knows not his time,' Eccles. ix. 11; he comes when the bird is flown. A hundred soldiers at one time may turn a battle, save an army, when thousands will not do at another. Satan knows when to make his approaches, when (if at any time) he is most likely to be entertained. As Christ hath 'the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season' of counsel and comfort to a doubting, drooping soul, so Satan shews his black art, and hellish skill, in speaking words of seduction and temptation in season; and a word in season is 'a word on its wheels.' I shall give you a view of his subtilty in special seasons, which he choses to tempt in.

The first season he takes to tempt in is, when newly converted. No sooner is this child of grace, the new creature, born, but this dragon pours a flood of temptation after it. He learned the Egyptians but some of his own craft, when he taught them that bloody and cruel baptism, which they exercised upon the Israelitish babes, in throwing them into the river as soon as they were born. The first cry of the new creature gives all the legions of hell an alarm; they are much troubled at it, as Herod and Jerusalem were when Christ was born: and now they sit in council to take away the life of this new-born king. The apostles met with more opposition and persecution in their latter days, when endued with large portions of the Spirit; but with temptations from Satan in the former, when young converts, as you may observe in the several passages recorded of them. Satan knew grace within was but weak, and their supplies promised at the Spirit's coming, not landed; and when is an enemy more like

Digitized by Google

to carry the town than in such a low condition? and therefore he tries them all. Indeed, the advantages are so many, that we may wonder how the young convert escapes with his life; knowledge weak, and so soon led into an error, especially in divided times; when many ways are held forth, one saying, Here is Christ: another, There is Christ; and the Christian ready to think every one means honestly that comes with good words; as a little child, that hath lost his way to his father's house, is prone to follow any that offer him their conduct. Experience of what he knows little; and if Adam, whose knowledge was so perfect, yet was soon cheated, (being assaulted before he was well warm in his new possessions,) how much more advantage hath Satan of the new convert, in whom he finds every grace in so great an indisposition to make resistance, both from its own weakness, and the strength of the contrary corruption, (which commonly in such is much unmortified,) which makes it act with more difficulty and mixture, as in a fire newly kindled, where the smoke is more than the flame; or like beer newly tunned, which runs thick; so that though there appear more strength of affection in such, that it works over into a greater abundance of duty than in others, yet with more dregs of carnal passion, which Satan knows, and therefore chooseth to stir what he sees troubled already.

Secondly, When the saint is beset with some great affliction; this is as some blind lane or solitary place, fit for this thief to call for his purse in. An expert captain first labours to make a breach in the wall, and then falls on in storming the city. Satan first got power from God to weaken Job in his estate, children, health, and other comforts he had, and now tempts him to impatience, and what not. He lets Christ fast forty days before he comes, and then he falls to his work; as an army stays till a castle be pinched for provision within, and then sends a parley, never more likely to be embraced than in such a strait. A temptation comes strong, when the way to relief seems to lie through the sin that Satan is wooing to: when one is poor, and Satan comes, What, wilt starve rather than step over the hedge, and steal for thy supply? This is enough to put flesh and blood to the stand.

Thirdly, When the Christian is about some notable enterprise for God's glory, then Satan will lie like a serpent in the way, 'an adder in the path, that biteth his horse's heels; so that his rider shall fall backward.' Thus he stood at Joshua's right hand 'to resist him.' The right hand is the working hand, and his standing there implies his desire to hinder him in his enterprise. Indeed, the devil was never a friend to temple-work, and therefore that work is so long a doing. What a handsome excuse doth he help the Jews unto—'The time is not come;' God's time was come, but not the devil's, and therefore he helps them to this poor shift, perverting the sense of Providence, as if it were not time, because they were so poor: whereas they thrive no better, because they went no sooner about the work, as God tells them plainly. Paul and Barnabas had a holy design in their thoughts to go visit the brethren in every city, and strengthen their faith; the devil knew what a blow this might give to his kingdom; their visiting might hinder him in his circuit, and he stirs up an unhappy difference between these two holy men, who grow so hot that they part in this storm. Acts xv. 30. There were two remarkable periods of Christ's life, his entrance and exit; his entrance into his public ministry at his baptism, and his finishing it at his passion; and at both we have the devil fiercely encountering him. The more public thy place, Christian, and the more eminent thy service for God, the more thou must look that the devil will have some more dangerous design or other against thee; and therefore, if every private soldier needs armour against Satan's bullets of temptation, then the commanders and officers who stand in the front of battle much more.

4. Fourthly, When he hath the presence of some object to enforce his temptation. Thus he takes Eve when she is near the tree, and had it in her eye while he should make the motion, that assaulting two ports at once, it might be the harder for her to hinder the landing of his temptation; and if Eve's eyes did so soon affect her heart with an inordinate desire, then much more now is it easy for him by the presence of the object to excite and actuate that lust which lies dormant in the heart. As Naomi sent her daughter to lie at Boaz's feet,

Digitized by Google

knowing well, if he endured her there, there was hope that he might take her into his bed at last: if the Christian can let the object come so near, Satan will promise himself his suit may in time be granted. Therefore it should be our care, if we would not yield to the sin, not to walk by, or sit at the door of the occasion: look not on the beauty with wandering eye, by which thou wouldest not be taken prisoner; parley not with that in thy thoughts, which thou meanest not to let into thy heart; conversation begets affection; some by this have been brought to marry those, whom at first they thought they could not have liked.

Fifthly, After great manifestations of God's love, then the tempter comes. Such is the weak constitution of grace, that it can neither well bear smiles nor frowns from God without a snare; as one said of our English nation, *Totam nec pati potest libertatem nec servitutem;* it cannot well bear liberty nor bondage in the height: so neither can the soul; if God smile and open himself a little familiarly to us, then we are prone to grow high and wanton; if he frown, then we sink as much in our faith; thus the one, like fair weather and warm gleams, brings up the weeds of corruption; and the other, like sharp frosts, nips and even kills the flowers of grace. The Christian is in danger on both hands, therefore Satan takes this advantage, when the Christian is flush of comfort, even as a cheater, who strikes in with some young heir, when he hath newly received his rents, and never leaves till he hath eased him of his money; thus Satan lies upon the catch, then to inveigle a saint into one sin or other, which he knows will soon leak out his joy. Had ever any a larger testimony from heaven than Peter, Matt. xvi. 17; where Christ pronounceth him blessed, and puts a singular honour upon him, making him the representative for all his saints? No doubt this favour to Peter stirred up the envious spirit sooner to fall upon him. If Joseph's party-coloured coat made the patriarchs to plot against him, their brother, no wonder malice should prompt Satan to show his spite, where Christ had set such a mark of love and honour; and therefore we find him soon at Peter's elbow, making him his instrument to tempt his Master, who soon espied his cloven foot, and rebukes Peter with a 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' He that seemed a rock even now, through Satan's policy, is laid a stone of offence for Christ to stumble at. So David, when he had received such wonderful mercies, settled in his throne with the ruin of his enemies, yea, pardoned for his bloody sin, now ready to lay down his head with peace in the dust; Satan steps in to cloud his clear evening, and tempts him to number the people: so ambitious is Satan, then chiefly, to throw the saint into the mire of sin, when his coat is cleanest.

Sixthly, At the hour of death, when the saint is down and prostrate in his bodily strength, now this coward falls upon him; it is the last cast indeed he hath for the game; now or never; overcome him now and ever. As they say of the natural serpent, *Nunquam nisi moriens producitur in longum*, he never is seen at his length till dying; so this mystical serpent never strains his wits and wiles more, than when his time is thus short. The saint is even stepping into eternity, and now he treads upon his heel, which if he cannot trip up, so as to hinder his arrival in heaven, yet at least to bruise it, that he may go with more pain thither.

CHAPTER II.

SATAN'S SUBTILTY IN MANAGING HIS TEMPTATIONS, WHERE SEVERAL STRATAGEMS USED BY HIM TO DECEIVE THE CHRISTIAN ARE LAID DOWN.

2. THE second way wherein Satan shows his tempting subtilty, is, in those stratagems he useth to deceive the Christian in the act of temptation.

First, He hangs out false colours, and comes up to the Christian in the disguise of a friend, so that the gates are opened to him, and his motions received with applause, before either be discovered; therefore he is said to 'transform himself into an angel of light,' 2 Cor. xi. 14. Of all plots it is most dangerous when he appears in Samuel's mantle, and silvers his foul tongue with fair language. Thus, in point of error, he corrupts some in their judgment, by commending his notions for special gospel-truths, and, like a cunning chapman, puts off his old

Digitized by Google

ware (errors I mean that have laid long upon his hand) only turning them a little after the mode of the times, and they go for new light; under the skirt of Christian liberty, he conveys in libertinism; by crying up the Spirit, he decries and vilifies the Scripture; by magnifying faith, he labours to undermine repentance, and blow up good works; by bewailing the corruption of the church in its administration, he draws unstable souls from it, and amuseth them, till at last they fall into a vertigo, and can see no church at all in being. And he prevails no less on the hearts and lives of men by this wile, than on their judgments. Under the notion of zeal, he kindles sometimes a dangerous flame of passion and wrath in the heart, which, like a rash fire, makes the Christian's spirit boil over into unchristian desires of and prayers for revenge where he should forgive, of which we have an instance in the disciples, Luke ix. 55; where two holy men are desiring that 'fire may come down from heaven.' Little did they think from whence they had their coal that did so heat them, till Christ told them, 'Ye know not what spirit ye are of.' Sometimes he pretends pity and natural affection, which in some cases may be good counsel, and all the while he desires to promote cowardice and sinful self-love, whereby the Christian may be brought to fly from his colours, shrink from the truth, or decline some necessary duty of his calling; this his wile Christ soon spied, when he got Peter to be his spokesman, saying, 'Master, pity thyself;' who stopped his mouth with that sharp rebuke, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' O what need have we to study the Scriptures, our hearts, and Satan's wiles, that we may not bid this enemy welcome, and all the while think it is Christ that is our guest!

A second policy he useth is, to get intelligence of the saints' affairs. This is one great wheel in the politicians' clock, to have spies in all places, by whom they are acquainted with the counsels and motions of their enemies, and this gives them advantage, as to disappoint their designs, so more safely to compass their own. It is no hard matter for him to play his game well that sees his enemy's hand. David knew how the squares went at court; Jonathan's arrows carried him the news, and accordingly he removed his quarters, and was too hard for his great enemy Saul. Satan is the greatest intelligencer in the world; he makes it his business to inquire into the inclinations, thoughts, affections, purposes of the creature, that finding which humour abounds, he may apply himself accordingly which way the stream goes, that he may open the passage of temptation, and cut the channel to the fall of the creature's affections, and not force it against the torrent of nature. Now, if we consider but the piercing apprehension of the angelical nature, how quick he is to take the scent which way the game goes, by a word dropped, the cast of an eye, or such a small matter, signal enough to give him the alarm, his experience in heart-anatomy, having inspected, and (as it were) dissected so many in his long practice, whereby his knowledge is much perfected; as also his great diligence to add to both these, being as close a student as ever, considering the saints and studying how he may do them a mischief, as we see in Job's case, whom he had so observed, that he was able to give an answer *ex tempore* to God, what Job's state and present posture was, and what might be the most probable means of obtaining his will of him; and besides all this, the correspondence that he hath with those in and about the Christian, from whom he learns much of his state, as David by Hushai, in Absalom's council—all these considered, it is almost impossible for the creature to stir out of the closet of his heart, but it will be known whither he inclines: some corrupt passion or other will bewray the soul to him, as they did David to Saul, who told him where he might find him, 'in the wilderness of Engedi,' 1 Sam. xxiv. 1. Thus will these give intelligence to Satan; and say, If thou wouldest surprise such a one, he is gone that way, you shall have him in the wood of worldly employments, over head and ears in the desires and cares of this life; see where another sits, under such a bower, delighting himself in this child, or that gift, endowment of mind, or the like; lay but the lime-twig there, and you shall soon have him in it. Now Satan, having this intelligence, lets him alone to act his part; he sure cannot be at a loss himself, when his scholars (the Jesuits, I mean), have such agility of mind, to wreathe and cast themselves into any form becoming the persons they would seduce. Is ambition the lust the heart favours? O the pleasing projects

Digitized by Google

that he will put such upon! How easily, having first blown them up with vain hopes, doth he draw them into horrid sins! Thus Haman, that he may have a monopoly of his prince's favour, is hurried into that bloody plot (fatal at last to himself) against the Jews. Is uncleanness the lust after which the creature's eye wanders? Now he will be the pander, to bring him and his minion together. Thus he finding Amnon sick of this disease, sends Jonadab, 'a deep-pated fellow,' 2 Sam. xiii. 3, to put this fine device into his head of feigning himself sick, whereby his sister fell into his snare.

Thirdly, In his gradual approaches to the soul. When he comes to tempt, he is modest, and asks but a little; he knows he may get that at many times, which he should be denied if he asked all at once. A few are let into a city, when an army coming in a body would be shut out; and therefore, that he may beget no suspicion, he presents, may be, a few general propositions, which do not discover the depth of this plot; these, like scouts, go before, while his whole body lies hid, as it were, in some swamp at hand. Thus he wriggled into Eve's bosom, whom he doth not at first dash bid take and eat; no, he is more mannerly than so; this would have been so hideous, that as the fish with some sudden noise, by a stone cast into the river, is scared from the bait, so would she have been affrighted from holding parley with such a one; no, he propounds a question which shall make way for this—'Hath God said?' Art not mistaken? Could this be his meaning whose bounty lets thee eat of the rest, to deny thee the best of all? Thus he digs about, and loosens the roots of their faith, and then the tree falls the easier the next gust of temptation. This is a dangerous policy indeed. Many have yielded to go a mile with Satan, that never intended to go two, but, when once on the way, have been allured further and further, till at last they know not how to leave his company. Thus Satan leads poor creatures down into the depths of sin by winding stairs, that let them not see the bottom whither they are going; first, he presents an object that occasions some thoughts, these set fire on the affections, and these fume up into the brain, and cloud the understanding, which, being thus disabled, now Satan dares a little more declare himself, and boldly solicit the creature to that it would otherwise have defied. Many who at this day lie in open profaneness, never thought they should have rolled so far from their profession; but Satan beguiled them, poor souls, with their modest beginnings. O Christians, give not place to Satan! no, not an inch in his first motions; he that is a beggar, and a modest one without doors, will command the house if let in; yield at first, and thou givest away thy strength to resist him in the rest; when the hem is worn, the whole garment will ravel out, if that be not mended by timely repentance.

The fourth way, wherein Satan shows his subtilty in managing his temptations, is in his reserves. A wise captain hath ever some fresh troops at hand to fall in at a pinch, when the others are worsted. Satan is seldom at a loss in this respect; when one temptation is beat back, he soon hath another to fill up the gap, and make good the line. Thus he tempts Christ to diffidence and distrust, by bidding him turn stones into bread, as if it were time now to carve for himself, being so long neglected of his Father, as to fast forty days, and no supplies heard of; no sooner had Christ quenched this dart with that, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' Mat. iv. 4, 5, but he had another on the string which he let fly at him, tempting him to presumption: ver. 5, 'Then the devil taketh and sets him on a pinnacle,' and bids, 'Cast thyself down headlong, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee,' &c. As if he had said, If thou hast such confidence on God and his word, as thou pretendest, shew it by casting thyself down, for thou hast a word between thee and the ground, if thou darest trust God; and truly, though Christ had his answer ready, and was prepared to receive his charge on the right hand and on the left, being so completely armed that no temptation could come amiss: yet note we, Satan's temptations on Christ were like the serpent's motion on a rock (of which Solomon speaks), that makes no impression, no dent at all, Prov. xxx. 19. But on us they are as a serpent on sand or dust, that leaves a print, when not in the heart, yet in the fancy colours that which is next door to it, and so the object there is ready to slip in, if great care be not observed, especially when he

Digitized by Google

doth thus change his hand, as when we have resisted one way, fall on afresh another, yea, plant his succeeding temptation upon our very resistance in the former. Now it requires some readiness in our postures, and skill at all our weapons, to make our defence; like a disputant, when he is put out of his road, and hath a new question started, or argument unusual brought, now he is tried to purpose. And truly this is Satan's way when he tempts the Christian to neglect of duties of God's worship (from his worldly occasions, the multitude of them, or necessity of following them), and this takes not, then he is on the other side, and is drawing the Christian to the neglect of his worldly calling, out of a seeming zeal to promote his other in the worship of God. Or first, he comes and labours to deaden the heart in duty; but the Christian, too watchful for him there, then he is puffing of him up with an opinion of his enlargement in it, and ever keeps his sliest and most sublimated temptations for the last.

Fifthly, In his politic retreats. You shall have an enemy flee as overcome, when it is on a design of overcoming; this was Joshua's wile, by which he caught the men of Ai in a trap, Josh. iii. 1. We read not only of Satan's being cast out, but of the 'unclean spirit's going out' (voluntarily), yet with a purpose to come again, and bring worse company with him, Matt. xii. 43. Satan is not always beat back by the dint and power of conquering grace, but sometimes he draws off, and raiseth his own siege, the more handsomely to get the Christian out of his fastnesses and trenches, that so he may snap him on the plains whom he cannot come at in his works and fortifications. Temptations send the saint to his castle, as the sight of the dog doth the coney to her burrow: now the soul walks the rounds, stands upon its guard, dares not neglect duty, because the enemy is under its very walls, shooting in his temptations continually; but when Satan seems to give the soul over, and the Christian finds he is not haunted with such motions as formerly, truly he is now prone to remit in his diligence, fail in his duty, and grow either infrequent or formal therein; as the Romans, whose valour decayed for want of the Carthaginian troops to alarm them. Let Satan tempt or not tempt, assault or retreat, keep thou in order, stand in a fighting posture, let his flight strengthen thy faith, but not weaken thy care. The Parthians do their enemies most hurt in their flight, shooting their darts as they run; and so may Satan do thee, if thy seeming victory makes thee secure.

CHAPTER III.

OF SATAN'S SUBTILTY IN CHOOSING INSTRUMENTS FIT FOR HIS TURN TO CARRY ON HIS TEMPTING DESIGN.

3. The third particular in which Satan shews his subtilty as a tempter, is in the choice of those instruments whom he useth for the carrying on this his design; he, as the master workman, cuts out the temptation, and gives it the shape; but sometimes he hath his journeymen to make it up; he knows his work may be carried on better by others, when he appears not above-board himself. Indeed there is not such a suitableness between the angelical nature and man's, as there is between one man and another, and therefore he cannot make his approaches so familiarly to us as man can do to man; and here, as in other things, he is God's ape. You know this very reason was given why the Israelites desired God might not speak to them, but Moses and God liked the motion; 'They have well said,' saith God, 'I will raise up a prophet from the midst of them like unto thee,' Deut. xviii. 17. Thus Satan, he useth the ministry of men like ourselves, by which, as he becomes more familiar, so he is less suspected, while, Joab-like, he gets another to do his errand. Now it is not any will serve his turn for this employment, he is very choice in the instruments he pitcheth on: it is not every soldier is fit for an embassage to treat with an enemy, to betray a town, and the like. Satan considers who can do his work to his greatest advantage; and in this he is unlike God, who is not at all choice in his instruments, because he needs none, and is able to do as well with one as another: but Satan's power being finite, he must patch up the defect of the lion's skin with the fox's. Now the persons Satan aims at for his instruments are chiefly of four sorts.

Digitized by Google

First, Persons of place and power. Secondly, Persons of parts and policy. Thirdly, Persons of holiness, or at least reputed so. Fourthly, Persons of relation and interest.

First, Satan makes choice of persons of place and power. These are either in the commonwealth or church; if he can, he will secure the throne and the pulpit, as the two forts that command the whole line. First, men of power in the commonwealth. It is his old trick to be tampering with such. A prince, a ruler, may stand for a thousand, therefore saith Paul to Elymas, when he would have turned the deputy from the faith, 'O full of all subtilty, thou child of the devil,' Acts xiii. 8. As if he had said, You have learned this of your father the devil, to haunt the courts of princes, wind into the favour of great ones. There is double policy Satan hath, in gaining such to his side. First, none have such advantage to draw others to their way; corrupt the captain, and it is hard if he bring not off his troop with him. When the princes, men of renown in their tribes, stood with Korah, Numb. xvi. 2, 10, presently a multitude are drawn into conspiracy. Let Jeroboam set up idolatry, and Israel is soon in a snare; it is said the people 'willingly walked after his commandment,' Hos. v. 11. Secondly, should the sin stay at court, and the infection go no further, yet the sin of such a one, though a good man, may cost a whole kingdom dear; 1 Chron. xxi. 1, 'Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number the people.' He owed Israel spite, and he pays them home in their king's sin, which dropped in a fearful plague upon their heads. Secondly, such as are in place and office in the church. No such way to infect the whole town, as to poison the cistern at which they draw their water. Who shall persuade Ahab that he may go to Ramoth Gilead and fall? Satan can tell: 'I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets,' 2 Kings xxii. 21. How shall the profane be hardened in their sins? Let the preachers sew pillows under their elbows, and cry, Peace, peace, and it is done. How may the worship of God come to be neglected? Let Hophni and Phinehas be but scandalous in their lives, and many both good and bad will 'abhor the sacrifice of the Lord.'

Secondly, He employeth persons of parts and policy; if any hath more pregnancy of wit and depth of reasons than other, he is the man Satan looks upon for his service; and so far he prevails, that very few of this rank are found amongst Christ's disciples, 'not many wise.' Indeed, God will not have his kingdom, either in the heart or in the world, maintained by carnal policy; it is a gospel command that we walk in godly simplicity, *sine plicis;* though the serpent can shrink up into his folds, and appear what he is not, yet it doth not become the saints to juggle or shuffle with God or men; and truly, when any of them have made use of the serpent's subtilty, it hath not followed their hand; Jacob got the blessing by a wile, but he might have had it cheaper with plain dealing. Abraham and Sarah both dissemble to Abimelech, God discovers their sin, and reproves them for it by the mouth of an heathen. Asa, out of state policy, joins league with Syria, yea, pawns the vessels of the sanctuary, and all for help; and what comes of all this? 'Herein thou hast done foolishly,' saith God, 'from henceforth thou shalt have wars.' Sinful policy shall not long thrive in the saint's hands well, but Satan will not go out of his way; he inquires for the subtilest-pated men, a Balaam, Ahithophel, Haman, Sanballat, men admired for their counsel and deep plots, these are for his turn. A wicked cause needs a smooth orator; bad ware a pleasing chapman, as in particular, his instruments he useth to seduce and corrupt the minds of men are commonly subtle-pated fellows, such, 'that if it were possible, would deceive the very elect.' This made the apostle so jealous of the Corinthians, whom he had espoused to Christ, lest as Eve by the serpent, so their 'minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.' He must be a cunning devil indeed that can draw off the spouse's love from her beloved; yet there is such a witchery in Satan's instruments, that many have been brought to fly on the face of those truths and ordinances, yea, Christ himself, to whom they have seemed espoused formerly. Now in three particulars this sort of Satan's instruments shew their master's subtilty.

First, In aspersing the good name of the sincere messengers of Christ. It is Satan's old trick to raise his credit upon the ruined reputation of Christ's

Digitized by Google

faithful servants. Thus he taught Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, to charge Moses and Aaron, 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation is holy,' Numb. xvi. 3, 16. They would make the people believe, that it was the pride of their heart to claim a monopoly to themselves, as if none but Aaron and his fraternity were holy enough to offer incense: and by this subtle practice they seduced, for a while, in a manner, the whole congregation to their side. So the lying prophets, that were Satan's knights of the post to Ahab, fell foul on good Micaiah. Our Saviour himself was no better handled by the Pharisees and their confederates; and Paul, the chief of the apostles, his ministry undermined, and his reputation blasted by false teachers, as if he had been some weak sorry preacher; 2 Cor. x. 10, 'His bodily presence is weak,' say they, 'and his speech contemptible;' and is this your admired man?

Secondly, In covering their impostures and errors with choice notions and excellent truths. Arius himself, and other dangerous instruments of Satan, were too wise to stuff their discourses with nothing but heterodox matter: precious truths dropped from them, with which they sprinkled their corrupt principles, yet with such art as should not easily be discerned. This, as one observes, our Saviour warns his disciples of, when he bids them 'beware of the leaven of the Pharisees;' that is, of their errors. But why leaven? For the secret mixture of it with the wholesome bread; you do not make your bread all of leaven, none would then eat it, but crumble a little into a whole batch, which sours all. Thus Christ doth tell the disciples, that the Pharisees among many truths mixed their errors, and therefore it behoves them to beware, lest with the truth the error go down also. Again, leaven is very like the dough, of the same grain with it, only differs in age and sourness; thus Christ intimates the resemblance of their errors to the truth, scraped, as it were, out of the Scriptures, but soured with their false glosses. This indeed makes it easy for Christ's sheep to be infected with the scab of error, because that weed which breeds the rot is so like the grass that nourisheth them.

Thirdly, Their subtilty appears in holding forth such principles as are indulgent to the flesh. This brings in whole shoals of silly souls into their net; the heart of man loves a life to shape a religion according to its own humour, and is ready to believe that to be a truth which favours its own inclination. Now there are three lusts that Satan's instruments labour to gratify in their doctrine: carnal reason, pride, and fleshly liberty.

First, Carnal reason. This is the great idol which the more intelligent part of the world worship, making it the very standard of their faith; and from this bitter root have sprung those Arian and Socinian heresies. And truly, he that will go no further than reason will carry him, may hold out in the plain way of the moral law; but when he comes to the depths of the gospel, must either go back, or be content that faith should help reason over.

Secondly, Another lust that Satan cockers—pride. Man naturally would be a god to himself, though by clambering so high he got his fall; and whatever doctrine nourisheth a good opinion of man in his own eye, this is acceptable to him, and this hath spawned another fry of dangerous errors,—the Pelagian and Semi-pelagian, which set nature upon its own legs, and persuade man he can go alone to Christ, or at least with a little external help of a hand to lead, or argument to excite, without any creating work in the soul. O! we cannot conceive how glib such stuff goes down. If one workman should tell you that your house is rotten, and must be pulled down and all new materials prepared; and another should say, No such matter; such a beam is good, and such a spar may stand; a little cost will serve the turn; it were no wonder that you should listen to him that would put you to least cost and trouble. The faithful servants of Christ tell sinners from the word, that man in his natural state is corrupt and rotten, that nothing of the old frame will serve, and there must needs be all new: but in comes the Arminian, and blows up the sinner's pride, and tells him he is not so weak or wicked as the other represents him; if thou wilt thou mayest repent and believe; or at least, by exerting thy natural abilities, oblige God to superadd what thou hast not. This is the workman that will please proud men best.

Thirdly, Satan by his instruments nourisheth that desire of fleshly liberty

Digitized by Google

which is in man by nature, who is a son of Belial, without yoke; and if he must wear any, that will please best which hath the softest lining, and pincheth the flesh least; and therefore, when the sincere teachers of the word will not abate the strictness of the command, but press sincere obedience to it, then come Satan's instruments, and say, These are hard task-masters, who will not allow one play-day in a year to the Christian, but tie him to continual duty; we will shew you an easier way to heaven. Come, saith the Papist, confess but once a year to the priest, pay him well for his pains, and be an obedient son of the Church, and we will dispense with all the rest. Come, saith the Antinomian, the gospel-charter allows more liberty than these legal preachers tell you of; they bid you repent and believe, when Christ hath done all these to your hand: what have you left to do but to nourish the flesh? Something sure is in it, that impostors find such quick return for their ware, while truth hangs upon the hand; and is it not this?—that they are content to afford heaven cheaper to their disciples, than Christ will to his. He that sells cheapest shall have the most customers, though at last best will be best cheap: truth, with self-denial, a better pennyworth than error with all its flesh-pleasing.

Fourthly, Satan makes choice of such as have a great name for holiness: none to a live bird to draw other birds into the net; but is it possible that such should do this work for the devil? Yes, such is the policy of Satan, and the frailty of the best, that the most holy men have been his instruments to seduce others. Abraham, he tempts his wife to lie: 'Say thou art my sister.' The old prophet leads the man of God out of his way, 1 Kings xiii. The holiness of the man, and the reverence of his age, it is like, gave authority to his counsel. O how this should make you watchful, whose long travail and great progress in the ways of God have gained you a name of eminency in the church, what you say, do, or hold, because you are file-leading men, and others look more on you than their way!

Fifthly, Satan chooseth such, as by relation or affection have deep interest in the persons he would gain. Some will kiss the child for his nurse's sake, and like the present for the hand that brings it. It is not likely David would have received that from Nabal which he took from Abigail, and thanked her. Satan sent the apple by Eve's hand to Adam. Delilah doth more with Samson than all the Philistines' bands. Job's wife brings him the poison: 'Curse God and die.' Some think Satan spared her life, when he slew his children and servants, (though she was also within his commission,) as the most likely instrument, by reason of her relation and his affection, to lead him into temptation. Satan employs Peter the disciple to tempt Christ; at another time his friends and kinsfolk. Some martyrs have confessed the hardest work they met with was to overcome the prayers and tears of their friends and relations; Paul himself could not get off this snare without heart-breaking: 'What mean you to weep, and to break my heart?' Acts xxi. 13.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEREIN THIS POINT OF SATAN'S SUBTILTY, AS A TEMPTER TO SIN, IS BRIEFLY APPLIED.

Use 1.—First, affect not sinful policy and subtilty; it makes you but like the devil. There is the wisdom of the serpent, which is commended: and that is, his perfection as a creature, in which both the literal and the mystical excel; the one in an ingenious observing nature, above the beasts of the field; and the other in knowledge, as an angel above men; but as the subtilty of the one and knowledge of the other is degenerate, and makes them more able to do mischief, the one to the bodies, the other to the souls of men, this kind of wisdom and subtilty is to be abhorred by us: 'The serpent's eye,' as one saith, 'does well only in the dove's head.'

First, Affect not subtilty in contriving any sin. Some are 'wise to do evil,' Jer. iv. 22; masters of this craft, who can, as they lie on their beds, cast their wicked designs into an artificial method, shewing a kind of devilish wit therein, as the Egyptians, who dealt wisely, as they thought, with the Israelites, and Jezebel, who had printed her bloody design in so fair a letter, that some might read her saint, while she was playing the devil. This is the black art indeed,

Digitized by Google

and will make the soul as black as hell that practiseth it. It is not hard for any, though a fool, to learn. Be but wicked, and the devil will help thee to be witty: come but a while to his school, and thou mayest soon be a cunning man. No sins speak a higher attainment in wickedness, than those which are the result of deliberate counsel and deep plottings. Creatures, as they go longer with their young, so their birth is more strong and perfect: as the elephant above all others. The longer a sin is in forming and forging within, and the oftener the head and heart meet about it, the more complete the sin. Here are many litters of unformed sin in one, such, I mean, that are conceived and cast forth in the hurry of an extemporary passion; such sudden acts shew weakness, these others deep wickedness.

Secondly, Take heed of hiding sin when thou hast committed it. This is one of the devices that is in man's heart, and as much art and cunning is shewn in this as in any one part of the sinner's trade. What a trick had the patriarchs to blind their father's eye with a bloody coat! Joseph's mistress, to prevent a charge from Joseph, accuseth him for what she is guilty, like the robber who scaped by crying out 'Stop the thief.' God taught man to make coats to cover his naked body, but the devil learned him to weave these coverings to hide the nakedness of his soul; the more subtle thou seemest, in concealing thy sin, the more egregiously thou playest the fool. None so shamed as the liar when found out, and that thou art sure to be. Thy covering is too short to hide thee from God's eye and what God sees, if thou dost not put thyself to shame, he will tell all the world of hereafter, however thou escapest in this life.

Thirdly, Take heed of subtilty and sinful policy, in compassing that which is lawful in itself: it is lawful to improve thy estate, and husband it well for thy posterity; but take not the devil's counsel, who will be putting thee upon some tricks in thy trade, and slights in thy dealing; such may go for wise men a while, but the prophet reads their destinies, Jer. xvi. 11, 'At his end he shall be a fool.' It is lawful to love our estate, life, liberty; but beware of sinful policy to save them. It is no wisdom to shuffle with God, by denying his truth, or shifting off our duty to keep correspondence with men; he is a weak fencer that lays his soul at open guard to be stabbed and wounded with guilt, while he is lifting up his hands to save a broken head. Our fear commonly meets us at that door by which we think to run from it. 'He that will save his life shall lose it.' As you love your peace, Christians, be plain-hearted with God and man, and keep the king's highway; go the plain way of the command to obtain thy desire, and not to leap over hedge and ditch to come a little sooner to the journey's end; such commonly either meet with some stop, that makes them come back with shame, or else put to venture their necks in some desperate leap. He is sure to come safer, if not sooner, home, that is willing to go a little about to keep God company. The historian's observation is worth the Christian's remembrance: 'Consilia callida prima specie læta, tractatu dura, eventu tristia."—*Liv.* Crafty counsels promise fair at first, but prove more difficult in the managing, and in the end do pay the undertaker home with desperate sorrow.

Use 2.—Is Satan so subtle? O then think not to be too cunning for the devil; he will be too hard for thee at last: sin not with thoughts of an after repentance; it is possible thou meanest this at present: but dost thou think, who sits down to play with this cheater, to draw out thy stock when thou pleasest? Alas, poor wretch, he has a thousand devices to carry thee on, and engage thee deeper, till he hath not left thee any tenderness in thy conscience as some have been served at play, intending only to venture a shilling or two yet have, by the secret witchery in gaming, played the very clothes off their back before they had done: O how many have thus sinned away all their principles, yea profession itself that they have not so much as this cloak left, but walk naked to their shame! Like children who get into a boat, think to play near the shore, but are unawares by a violent gust carried down to the wide sea. O how know you that dally with Satan, but that at last you may, who begin modestly, be carried down to the broad sea of profaneness? Some men are so subtle to overreach, and so cruel when they get men into their hand, that a man had better beg his bread than borrow of them. Such a

Digitized by Google

merchant is Satan, cunning to insinuate, and get the creature into his books, and when he hath him on the hip, no more mercy to be had at his hand, than the lamb may expect from the ravenous wolf.

Use 3.—Study his wiles, and acquaint thyself with Satan's policy. Paul takes it for granted, that every saint doth in some measure understand them: 'We are not ignorant of his devices,' 2 Cor. ii. 11. He is but an ill fencer that knows and observes nothing of his enemy's play; many particular stratagems I have laid down already which may help a little; and for thy direction in this study of, and inquiry into, Satan's wiles, take this threefold counsel.

First, Take God into thy counsel: heaven overlooks hell. God at any time can tell thee what plots are hatching there against thee. Consider Satan, as he is God's creature, so God cannot but know him. He that makes the watch, knows every pin in it He formed this crooked serpent, though not the crookedness of this serpent; and though Satan's way in tempting be as wonderful as the way of a serpent on a rock, yet God traceth him; yea, knows all his thoughts together. 'Hell itself is naked before him,' and the destroyer hath no covering. Again, consider him as God's prisoner, who hath him fast in chains; and so the Lord, who is his keeper, must needs know whither his prisoner goes, who cannot stir without his leave. Lastly, consider him as his messenger; for so he is. 'An evil spirit from the Lord vexed Saul;' and he that gives him his errand, is able to tell thee what it is. Go then, and plough with God's heifer; improve thy interest in Christ, who knows what his Father knows, and is ready to reveal all that concerns thee, to thee, John xv. 15. It was he who foretold the devil's coming against Peter and the rest of the apostles, and faithfully revealed it to them, Luke xxii., before they thought of any such matter. Through Christ's hands pass all that is transacted in heaven and hell. We live in days of great actions, deep counsels, and plots on all sides, and only a few that stand on the upper end of the world know these mysteries of state; all the rest know little more than pamphlet intelligence: thus it is in regard of those plots which Satan in his infernal conclave is laying against the souls of men; they are but a few that know anything to purpose of Satan's design against them; and those are the saints, from whom God cannot hide his own counsels of love, but sends his Spirit to reveal unto them here, what he hath prepared for them in heaven, 1 Cor. ii. 10.; and therefore much less will he conceal any destructive plot of Satan from them.

Secondly, Be intimately acquainted with thy own heart, and thou wilt the better know his design against thee, who takes his method of tempting from the inclination and posture of thy heart. As a general walks about the city, and views it well, and then raiseth his batteries where he has the greatest advantage: so doth Satan compass and consider the Christian in every part before he tempts.

Lastly, Be careful to read the word of God with observation. In it thou hast the history of the most remarkable battles that have been fought by the most eminent worthies in Christ's army of saints, with the great warrior Satan: here thou mayest see how Satan hath foiled them, and how they have recovered their lost ground. Here you have his cabinet councils opened. There is not a lust which you are in danger of, but you have it described; not a temptation which the word doth not arm you against. It is reported that a certain Jew would have poisoned Luther, but was happily prevented by his picture that was sent to Luther, with a warning from a faithful friend, to take heed of such a man when he saw him: by which he knew the murderer, and escaped his hands. The words shew thee, O Christian, the face of those lusts which Satan employs to butcher thy precious soul; 'By them is thy servant warned,' saith David, Psa. xix. 11.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN IS SHEWED THE SUBTILTY OF SATAN, AS A TROUBLER AND AN ACCUSER FOR SIN; WHERE MANY OF HIS WILES AND POLICIES TO DISQUIET THE SAINTS' SPIRITS ARE DISCOVERED.

THE second general in which Satan appears such a subtle enemy, is, in molesting the saints' peace, and disquieting the saints' spirit. As the Holy

Digitized by Google

Spirit's work is not only to be a sanctifier, but also a comforter, whose fruits are righteousness and peace; so the evil spirit Satan is both a seducer unto sin, and an accuser for sin, a tempter and a troubler, and indeed in the same order. As the Holy Ghost is first a sanctifier, and then a comforter; so Satan first a tempter, then a troubler. Joseph's mistress first tries to draw him to gratify her lust; that string breaking, she had another, to trounce him and charge him; and for a plea, she hath his coat to cover her malice; nor is it hard for Satan to pick some hole in the saint's coat, when he walks most circumspectly. The proper seat of sin is the will; of comfort, the conscience: Satan hath not absolute knowledge of or power over these (being locked up from any other but God), and therefore what he doth, either in defiling, tempting, or disquieting, is by wiles more than by open force, and he is not inferior in troubling to himself in tempting. Satan hath, as the serpent, a way by himself; other beasts, their motion is direct, right on, but the serpent goes askew, as we say, winding and wreathing its body, that when you see a serpent creeping along, you can hardly discern which way it tends; thus Satan in his vexing temptations hath many intricate policies, turning this way and that way, the better to conceal his designs from the saint, which will appear in these following methods.

Section I.—First, He vexeth the Christian by laying his brats at the saint's door, and charging him with that which is his own creature; and here he hath such a notable art, that many dear saints of God are wofully hampered and dejected, as if they were the vilest blasphemers and veriest atheists in the world; whereas indeed the cup is of his own putting into the sack, but so slily conveyed into the saint's bosom, that the Christian, though amazed and frightened at the sight of them, yet being jealous of his own heart, and unacquainted with Satan's tricks of this kind, cannot conceive how such motions should come there, if not bred in, and vomited out by, his own naughty heart, and so bears the blame of the sin himself, because he cannot find the right father, mourning as one that is forlorn and cast off by God, or else, saith he, I should never have such vermin of hell creeping in my bosom; and here Satan hath his end he proposeth; for he is not so silly as to hope he should have welcome with such a horrid crew of blasphemous and atheistical thoughts in that soul, where he hath been denied when he came in an enticing way; no, but his design is by way of revenge, because the soul will not prostitute itself to his lust otherways, therefore to haunt it and scare it with those imps of blasphemy. As he served Luther, to whom he appeared, and when repulsed by him went away, and left a noisome stench behind him in the room. Thus when the Christian has worsted Satan in his more pleasing tempations, being maddened, he belcheth forth this stench of blasphemous motions to annoy and affright him, that from them the Christian may draw some sad conclusion or other; and indeed the Christian's sin lies commonly more in the conclusion which he draws from them, as that he is not a child of God, than in the motions themselves. All the counsel, therefore, I shall give thee in this case, is to do with these motions, as you use to serve those vagrants and rogues that come about the country; whom, though you cannot keep from passing through the town, yet you look they settle not there, but whip them and send them to their own home. Thus, give these motions the law, in mourning for them, resisting of them, and they shall not be your charge; yea, it is like you shall seldomer be troubled with such guests; but if once you come to entertain them, and be Satan's nurse to them, then the law of God will cast them upon you.

Section II.—Secondly, Another wile of Satan as a troubler, is in aggravating the saint's sins (against which he hath a notable declamatory faculty), not that he hates the sin, but the saint; now in this, his chief subtilty is so to lay his charge, that it may seem to be the act of the Holy Spirit; he knows an arrow out of God's quiver wounds deep; and therefore when he accuseth, he comes in God's name; as suppose a child were conscious to himself of displeasing his father, and one that owes him a spite, to trouble him, should counterfeit a letter from his father, and cunningly convey it into the son's hand, who receives it as from his father, wherein he chargeth him with many heavy crimes, disowns him, and threatens he shall never come into his sight, or have a penny portion from him; the poor son, conscious to himself of many undutiful

Digitized by Google

carriages, and not knowing the plot, takes on heavily, and can neither eat nor sleep for grief; here is a real trouble begot from a false and imaginary ground. Thus Satan observes how the squares go between God and his children; such a saint he sees tardy in his duty, faulty in that service, and he knows the Christian is conscious of this, and that the Spirit of God will also shew his distaste for these; both which prompts Satan to draw a charge at length, raking up all the bloody aggravations he can think of, and gives it in to the saint as sent from God. Thus he taught Job's friends to pick up those infirmities, which dropped from him in his distress, and shoot them back in his face, as if indeed they had been sent from God to declare him a hypocrite, and denounce his wrath for the same.

Quest. But how should we know the false accusations of Satan from the rebukes of God and his Spirit?

Answ. First, If they cross any former act or work of the Spirit in thy soul, they are Satan's, and not the Holy Spirit's. Now you shall observe, Satan's scope in accusing the Christian, and aggravating his sin, is to unsaint him, and persuade him he is but a hypocrite. O, saith Satan, now thou hast shewn what thou art, see what a spot is on thy coat, this is not the spot of a child; who ever, that was a saint, committed such a sin after such a sort? All thy comforts and confidence, which thou hast boasted of, were false, I warrant you. Thus you see Satan at one blow dasheth all in pieces. The whole fabric of grace, which God hath been rearing up many years in the soul, must now at one puff of his malicious mouth be blown down, and all the sweet comforts with which the Holy Ghost hath sealed up God's love, must be defaced with this one blot, which Satan draws over the fair copy of the saint's evidence. Well, soul, for thy comfort know, if ever the Spirit of God hath begun a sanctifying or comforting work, causing thee to hope in his mercy, he never is, will, or can be the messenger to bring contrary news to thy soul; his language is not yea and nay, but yea and amen for ever. Indeed, when the saint plays the wanton, he can chide, yea, will frown, and tell the soul roundly of its sin, as he did David by Nathan; 'Thou art the man,' this thou hast done; and paints out his sin with such bloody colours, as made David's heart melt, as it were, into so many drops of water. But that shall not serve his turn; he tells them what a rod is stooping for him, that shall smart to purpose; one of his own house, no other than his darling son, shall rise up against him, that he may the more fully conceive how ill God took the sin of him, a child, a saint, when he shall know what it is to have his beloved child traitorously invade his crown, and unnaturally hunt for his precious life; yet not a word all this while is heard from Nathan teaching David to unsaint himself, and call in question the work of God in his soul. No, he had no such commission from God; he was sent to make him mourn for his sin, not from his sin to question his state, which God had so oft put out of doubt.

Secondly, When they asperse the riches of God's grace, and so charge the Christian, that withal they reflect upon the good name of God; then they are not of the Holy Spirit, but from Satan. When you find your sins so represented and aggravated to you, as exceeding either the mercy of God's nature, or the grace of his covenant, *Hic se aperit diabolus;* this comes from that foul liar. The Holy Spirit is Christ's spokesman to commend him to souls, and to woo sinners to embrace the grace of the gospel; and can such words drop from the sacred lips, as should break the match, and sink Christ's esteem in the thoughts of the creature? you may know where this was minted. When you hear one commend another for a wise and good man, and at last come in with a 'but' that dasheth all, you will easily think he is no friend to the man, but some sly enemy, that by seeming to commend, desires to disgrace the more. Thus, when you find God represented to you as merciful and gracious, but not to such a great sinner as you; to have power and strength, but not able to save thee; you may say, Avaunt, Satan, thy speech bewrayeth thee.

Section III.—Thirdly, Another wile of Satan lies in cavilling at the Christian's duties and performances, by which he puts him to much toil and trouble. He is at church as soon as thou canst be, Christian, for thy heart; yea, he stands under thy closet window, and heareth what thou sayest to God in secret,

Digitized by Google

all the while studying how he may commence a suit against thee for thy duty; like those that come to sermons to carp and catch at what the preacher saith, that they may make him an offender for some word or other misplaced; or like a cunning opponent in the schools, while his adversary is busy in reading his position, he is studying to confute it; and truly Satan hath such an art at this, that he is able to take our duties in pieces, and so disfigure them that they shall appear formal, though never so zealous; hypocritical, though enriched with much sincerity. When thou hast done thy duty, Christian, then stands up this sophister to ravel out thy work; there, will he say, thou playedst the hypocrite; zealous, but serving thyself; here wandering, there nodding; a little farther puffed up with pride; and what wages canst thou hope for at God's hands, now thou hast spoiled his work, and cut it all out into chips? Thus he makes many poor souls lead a weary life; nothing they do but he hath a fling at, that they know not whether best pray or not, hear or not; and when they have prayed and heard, whether it be to any purpose or not: thus their souls hang in doubt, and their days pass in sorrow, while their enemy stands in a corner and laughs at the cheat he hath put upon them; as one who, by putting a counterfeit spider into the dish, makes those who sit at table either out of conceit with the meat, that they dare not eat, or afraid of themselves, if they have eaten, lest they should be poisoned with their meat.

Quest. But you will say, What will you have us to do in this case, to withstand the cavils of Satan, in reference to our duties?

Answ. First, Let this make thee more accurate in all thou doest; it is the very end God aims at in suffering Satan thus to watch you, that you his children might be the more circumspect, because you have one overlooks you, that will be sure to tell tales of you to God, and accuse thee to thy own self. Doth it not behove thee to write thy copy fair, when such a critic reads and scans it over? Doth it not concern thee to know thy heart well, to turn over the Scriptures diligently, that thou mayest know the state of thy soul-controversy in all the cases of conscience thereof, when thou hast such a subtle opponent to reply upon thee?

Secondly, Let it make thee more humble. If Satan can charge thee with so much in thy best duties, O what then can thy God do? God suffers sometimes the infirmities of his people to be known by the wicked (who are ready to check and mock them for them) for this end, to humble his people; how much more low should these accusations of Satan, which are in a great measure too true, lay us before God!

Thirdly Observe the fallacy of Satan's argument, which, discovered, will help thee to answer his cavil: the fallacy is double.

First, He will persuade thee that thy duty and thyself are hypocritical, proud, formal, &c., because something of these sins are to be found in thy duty. Now, Christian, learn to distinguish between pride in a duty, and a proud duty; hypocrisy in a person, and a hypocrite; wine in a man, and a man in wine. The best of saints have the stirrings of such corruptions in them, and in their services; these birds will light on an Abraham's sacrifice; but comfort thyself with this, that if thou findest a party within thy bosom pleading for God, and entering its protests against these, thou and thy services are evangelically perfect. God beholds these as the weaknesses of thy sickly state here below, and pities thee, as thou wouldest do thy lame child. How odious is he to us that mocks one for natural defects, a blear eye or a stammering tongue? Such are these in thy new nature. Observable is that in Christ's prayer against Satan, Zech. iii. 3, 'The Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee; is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' As if Christ had said, Lord, wilt thou suffer this envious spirit to twit thy poor child with, and charge him for, those infirmities that cleave to his imperfect state? he is but new plucked out of the fire, no wonder there are some sparks unquenched, some corruptions unmortified, some disorders unreformed in his place and calling. And what Christ did for Joshua, he doth incessantly for all his saints, apologising for their infirmities with his Father.

Secondly, His other fallacy is in arguing from the sin that is in our duties to the non-acceptance of them. Will God, saith he, thinkest thou, take such

Digitized by Google

broken groats at thy hand? Is he not a holy God? Now here, Christian, learn to distinguish and answer Satan. There is a double acceptance. There is an acceptance of a thing by way of payment of debt, and there is an acceptance of a thing offered as a token of love and a testimony of gratitude. He that will not accept of broken money, or half the sum for payment of a debt; the same man, if his friend sends him, though but a bent sixpence, in token of his love will take it kindly. It is true, Christian, the debt thou owest to God must be paid in good and lawful money; but, for thy comfort, here Christ is thy paymaster; send Satan to him, bid him bring his charge against Christ who is ready at God's right hand to clear his accounts, and shew his discharge for the whole debt. But now thy performances and obedience come under another notion, as tokens of thy love and thankfulness to God; and such is the gracious disposition of thy heavenly Father, that he accepts thy mite: love refuseth nothing that love sends. It is not the weight or worth of the gift, but 'the desire of a man is his kindness,' Prov. xix. 22.

SECTION IV.—A fourth wile of Satan as a troubler, is, to draw the saint into the depths of despair, under a specious pretence of not being humbled enough for sin. This we find singled out by the apostle for one of the devil's fetches: 'We are not ignorant,' saith he, 'of his devices,' 2 Cor. ii. 11; his sophistical reasonings. Satan sets much by this flight; no weapon oftener in his hand: where is the Christian that hath not met him at this door? Here Satan finds the Christian easy to be wrought on, the humours being stirred to his hand; while the Christian of his own accord, complains of the hardness of his heart, and is very prone to believe any who comply with his musing thoughts; yea think every one who flatters him that would persuade him otherwise. It is easier to dye that soul into black, which is of a sad colour already, than to make such a one take the lightsome tincture of joy and comfort.

Quest. But how shall I answer this subtle enemy, when he thus perplexeth my spirit, with not being humbled enough for sin, &c.?

Answ. I answer as to the former; Labour to spy the fallacy of his argument, and his mouth is soon stopped.

First, Satan argues thus; There ought to be a proportion between sin and sorrow; but there is no proportion between thy sins and thy sorrow; therefore thou art not humbled enough. What a plausible argument is here at first blush! For the major, that there ought to be a proportion between sin and sorrow, this Satan will show you Scripture for. Manasseh was a great sinner, and an ordinary sorrow will not serve his turn; 'he humbled himself greatly before the Lord,' 1 Chron. iii. 12. No, saith Satan, weigh thy sin in the balance with thy sorrow; art thou as great a mourner as thou hast been a sinner? So many years thou hast waged war against the Almighty, making havoc of his laws, loading his patience till it groaned again, raking in the sides of Christ with thy bloody dagger, while thou didst grieve his Spirit, and reject his grace; and dost think a little remorse, like a rolling cloud, letting fall a few drops of sorrow, will now be accepted? No, thou must steep in sorrow, as thou hast soaked in sin. Now, to show you the fallacy we must distinguish of a two-fold proportion of sorrow.

1st, An exact proportion of sorrow to the inherent nature and demerit of sin.

2ndly, There is a proportion to the law and rule of the gospel. Now the first is not a thing feasible, because the injury done in the least sin is infinite, because done to an infinite God; and if it could be feasible, yet according to the tenour of the first covenant, it would not be acceptable; because it had no clause to give any hope for an after-game by repentance; but the other, which is a gospel sorrow, this is indeed repentance unto life, Acts v. 31; Zech. xii. 10 (both given by the spirit of the gospel, and to be tried by the rule of the gospel.) This is given for thy relief. As you see sometimes in the highway, where the waters are too deep for travellers, you have a foot-bridge or causey, by which they may escape the flood, and safely pass on; so that none but such as have not eyes, or are drunk, will venture to go through the waters, when they may avoid the danger. Thou art a dead man, if thou think to answer thy sin with proportionable sorrow; thou wilt soon be above thy depth, and drown thyself with thy own tears, but never get over the least sin thou committest;

Digitized by Google

go not on, therefore, as thou lovest thyself, but turn aside to this gospel-path, and thou escapest the danger. O you tempted souls, when Satan saith you are not humbled enough, see where you may be relieved: 'I am a Roman,' saith Paul, 'I appeal to Cæsar.' I am a Christian, say, I appeal to Christ's law. And what is the law of the gospel concerning this? Heart-sorrow is gospel-sorrow; 'They were pricked in their heart,' Acts i. 37. And Peter, like an honest surgeon, will not keep these bleeding patients longer in pain with their wounds open, but presently claps on the healing plaster of the gospel: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus.' Now a prick to the heart is more than a wound to the conscience. The heart is the seat of life. Sin wounded, there lies a dying. To do anything from the heart makes it acceptable, Eph. vi. 6; 2 Cor. v. 11. Now, poor soul, hadst thou sat thus long in the devil's stocks, if thou hadst understood this aright? Doth thy heart clear or condemn thee, when in secret thou art bemoaning thy sin before God? If thy heart be false, I cannot help you; no, not the gospel itself; but if sincere, thou hast boldness with God, 1 John iii. 21.

A second argument Satan useth, is this: He whose sorrow falls short of theirs that never truly repented, he is not humble enough. But, soul, thy sorrow falls short of some, that never truly repented; Ergo. Well, the first proposition is true, but how will Satan prove his minor? Thus, Ahab, he took on for his sin, and went in sackcloth. Judas, he made bitter complaint. O (saith Satan) didst thou not know such a one that lay under terror of conscience, walking in a sad mournful condition so many months, and every one took him for the greatest convert in the country; and yet he at last fell foully and proved an apostate; but thou never didst feel such smart, pass so many weary nights and days in mourning and bitter lamentation as he hath done, therefore thou fallest short of one that fell short of repentance. And truly this is a sad stumbling-block to a soul in an hour of temptation. Like a ship sunk in the mouth of the harbour, which is more dangerous to others than if it had perished in the open sea. There is less scandal by the sins of the wicked, who sink, as it were, in the broad sea of profaneness, than in those who are convinced of sin, troubled in conscience, and miscarry so near the harbour, within sight, as it were, of saving grace. Tempted souls can hardly get over these without dashing. Am I better than such a one that proved naught at last? Now to help thee a little to find out the fallacy of this argument, we must distinguish between the terrors that accompany sorrow, and the intrinsical nature of this grace. The first, which are accessory, may be separated from the other, as the raging of the sea, which is caused by the wind, from the swell of the sea, when the wind is down. From this distinction take two conclusions.

First, One may fall short of a hypocrite in the terrors that sometimes accompany sorrow, and yet have the truth of this grace, which the other with all his terrors wants. Christians run into many mistakes, by judging rather according to that which is accessory, than that which is essential to the nature of duties and graces. Sometimes thou hearest one pray with a moving expression, whilst thou canst hardly get out a few broken words in duty, and thou art ready to accuse thyself and to admire him; as if the gilt of the key made it open the door the better; thou seest another abound with joy which thou wantest, and art ready to conclude his grace more, and thine less, whereas thou mayest have more real grace, only thou wantest a light to show thee where it lies. Take heed of judging by accessories; perhaps thou hast not heard so much of the rattling of the chains of hell, nor in thy conscience the outcries of the damned, to make thy flesh tremble; but hast thou not seen that in a bleeding Christ, which hath made thy heart melt and mourn, yea, loathe and hate thy lusts more than the devil himself? Truly, Christian, it is strange to hear a patient complain of the physician (when he finds his physic work effectually, to the evacuating of his distempered humours, and the restoring his health), merely because he was not so sick as some others with the working of it: soul, thou hast more reason to be blessing God that the convictions of the Spirit wrought so kindly on thee, to effect that in thee, without those terrors, which have cost others so dear.

Secondly, This is so weak an argument, that contrariwise the more the

Digitized by Google

terrors are, the less the sorrow is for sin while they remain: these are indeed preparatory sometimes to sorrow; they go before this grace, as austere John before meek Jesus. But as John went down, Christ went up, when his increase was John's decrease; so as truly godly sorrow goes up, these terrors go down. As the wind gathers the clouds, but those clouds seldom melt into a set rain, until the wind falls that gathered them; so these terrors raise the clouds of our sins in our consciences, but when these sins melt into godly sorrow, this lays the storm presently; indeed as the loud winds do blow away the rain, so these terrors do keep off the soul from this gospel sorrow. While the creature is making an outcry, It is damned, it is damned—it is taken up so much with the fear of hell, that sin as sin (which is the proper object of godly sorrow) is little looked on or mourned for. A murderer condemned to die is so possessed with the fear of death, and thought of the gallows, that there lies the slain body (it may be) before him, unlamented by him; but when his pardon is brought, then he can bestow his tears freely on his murdered friend; 'They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn.' Faith is the eye; this eye, beholding its sin piercing Christ, and Christ pardoning its sin, affects the heart, the heart affected sighs; these inward clouds melt and run from the eye of faith in tears; and all this is done when there is no tempest of terror upon the spirit, but a sweet serenity of love and peace: and therefore, Christian, see how Satan abuseth thee, when he would persuade thee thou art not humbled enough, because thy sorrow is not attended with these illegal terrors.

CHAPTER VI.

A BRIEF APPLICATION OF THE SECOND BRANCH OF THE POINT, VIZ., OF SATAN'S SUBTILTY AS A TROUBLER AND ACCUSER FOR SIN.

Use 1. Is Satan so subtle to trouble the saints' peace? This proves them to be the children of Satan, who show the same art and subtilty, in vexing the spirit of the saints, as doth their infernal father; not to speak of bloody persecutors, who are the devil's slaughter-slaves to butcher the saints; but of those who more slily trouble and molest the saints' peace.

First, Such as rake up the saints' old sins, which God hath forgiven and forgotten, merely to grieve their spirits and besputter their names, these show their devilish malice indeed; who can take such pains to travel many years back, that they may find a handful of dirt to throw on the saint's face. Thus Shimei twitted David; 'Come out, thou bloody man,' 1 Sam. i. 6, 7. When you that fear God meet with such reproaches, answer them as Beza did the Papists, who for want of other matter, charged him for some wanton poems, penned by him in his youth; *Hi homunciones invident mihi gratiam Dei.* These men, said he, grudge me the pardoning mercy of God.

Secondly, Such as watch for the saints' halting, and catch at every infirmity to make them odious and themselves merry. It is a dreadful curse such bring upon themselves (though they little think of it), no less than Amalek's, the remembrance of whose name God threatened 'to blot from under heaven.' Why? What had Amalek done to deserve this? They 'smote the hindermost, those that were feeble,' Deut. xxv. 19, and could not march with the rest. And was it so great a cruelty to do this? Much more to smite with the edge of a mocking tongue the feeble in grace.

Thirdly, Such who father their sins upon the saints; thus Ahab calls the prophet 'the troubler of Israel,' when it was himself and his father's house. What a grief was it, think you, to Moses's spirit, for the Israelites to lay the blood of those that died in the wilderness at his door! Whereas, God knows, he was their constant bail, when at any time God's hand was up to destroy them. And this is the charge which the best of God's servants in this crooked generation of ours lie under. We may thank them, say the profane, for all our late miseries in the nation; we were well enough till they would reform us. O for shame! blame not the good physic that was administered, but the corrupt body of the nation that could not bear it.

Fourthly, Such as will themselves sin, merely to trouble the saints' spirit; thus Rabshakeh blasphemed, and when desired to speak in another language, he

Digitized by Google

goes on the more to grieve them. Sometimes you shall have a profane wretch, (knowing one to be conscientious, and cannot brook to hear the name of God taken in vain, or the ways of God flouted,) who will on purpose fall upon such discourse as shall grate his chaste ears, and trouble his gracious spirit; such a one strikes father and child at one blow; thinks it not enough to dishonour God, except the saint stands by to see and hear the wrong done to his heavenly Father.

Use 2. Secondly, This may afford matter of admiration and thankfulness to any of you, O ye saints, who are not at this day under Satan's hatches. Is he so subtle to disquiet; and hast thou any peace in thy conscience? To whom art thou beholden for that serenity that is in thy spirit? To none but thy God, under whose wing thou sittest so warm and safe. Is there not combustible matter enough in thy conscience for his sparks to kindle? Perhaps thou hast not committed such bloody sins as others; that is not the reason of thy peace; for the least is big enough to damn, much more to trouble thee. Thou hast not grossly fallen, may be, since conversion; that is rare, if thou art of long standing; yet the ghosts of thy unregenerate sins might walk in thy conscience. Thou hast had many testimonies of God's favour; hast thou not? Who more than David? Ps. lxxvii. Yet he is at a loss sometimes, learning to spell his evidences as if he could never have read them. The sense of God's love comes and goes with the present taste. He that is in the dark, while there, sees not the more for former light. O bless God for that light which shines in at thy window; Satan is plotting to undermine thy comfort every day. This thief sees thy pleasant fruits as they hang, and his teeth water at them, but the wall is too high for him to climb; thy God keeps this serpent out of thy paradise. It is not the grace of God in thee, but the favour of God, as a shield about thee, defends thee from the wicked one.

Use 3. Thirdly, Let Satan's subtilty, to molest your peace, make thee, O Christian, more wise and wary; thou hast not a fool to deal with, but one that hath wit enough to spill thy comfort, and spoil thy joy, if not narrowly watched. This is the dainty bit he gapes for; it is not harder to keep the flies out of your cupboards in summer, from tainting your provision, than Satan out of your consciences; many a sweet meal hath he robbed the saints of, and sent them supperless to bed; take heed, therefore, that he roams not thine away also.

CHAPTER VII.

CONTAINING SOME DIRECTIONS, TENDING TO ENTRENCH AND FORTIFY THE CHRISTIAN AGAINST THE ASSAULTS AND WILES OF THE DEVIL, AS A TROUBLER OF THE SOUL'S PEACE.

Quest. How shall I stand in a defensive posture, may the Christian say, against these wiles of Satan as a troubler?

SECTION I.—*Answ.* First, If thou wouldest be guarded from him as a troubler, take heed of him as a seducer. The haft of Satan's hatchet, with which he lies chopping at the root of the Christian's comfort, is commonly made of the Christian's wood. First, he tempts to sin, and then for it. Satan is but a creature, and cannot work without tools; he can indeed make much of a little, but not anything of nothing, as we see in his assaulting of Christ, where he troubled himself to little purpose, because 'he came and found nothing in him,' John xiv. 30. Though the devil throws the stone, yet it is the mud in us that disturbs our comforts. It was in vain for the Philistines to fall on Samson till his lock was cut: take heed therefore of yielding to his enticing motions; these are the stumbling-blocks, at which he hopes thou wilt bruise thy conscience, which, when once done, let him alone to spin out the cure. Indeed, 'a saint's flesh heals not so easily as others': drink not of the devil's wassail, there is poison in the cup, his wine is a mocker; look not on it as it sparkles in the temptation; what thou drinkest down with sweetness, thou wilt be sure to bring up again as gall and wormwood. Above all sins, take heed of presumptuous ones, thou are not out of the danger of such, Ps. xix. 13. Sad stories we have of saints' falls; and what follows? Then take him, jailor,

Digitized by Google

saith God, 'deliver such a one unto Satan;' and if a saint be the prisoner, and the devil the keeper, you may guess how he shall be used. O how he will tear and rend thy conscience! though that dreadful ordinance is not used, as it should be, in the church, yet God's court sits, and if he excommunicates a soul from his presence, he falls presently into Satan's clutches. Well, if through his subtilty thou hast been overtaken, take heed thou stayest not in the devil's quarters; shake the viper off thy hand, haste thee to thy surgeon; green wounds cure best, but if thou neglectest, and the wind get to it, thy conscience will soon fester. Ahab, we read, 1 Kings xxii. 35, was wounded in battle, and was loth to yield to it: it is said, 'he was held up in his chariot,' but he died for it: when a soul hath received a wound, committed a sin, Satan labours to bolster him up with flattering hopes, holds him up, as it were, in the chariot against God; what, yield for this? afraid for a little scratch, and lose the spoil of thy future pleasure for this? O take heed of listening to such counsel; the sooner thou yieldest, the fairer quarter thou shalt have. Every step in this way sets thee further from thy peace. A rent garment is catched by every nail, and the rent made wider. Renew therefore thy repentance speedily, whereby this breach may be made up, and worse prevented, which else will befall thee.

Section II.—Secondly, Study that grand gospel-truth of a soul's justification before God; acquaint thyself with this in all its causes; the moving cause, the free mercy of God, being justified freely by his grace, Rom. iii. 24; the meritorious, which is the blood of Christ; and the instrumental faith, with all the sweet privileges that flow from it. An effectual door once opened to let the soul into this truth, would not only spoil the pope's market, as Gardner said, but the devil's also; when Satan comes to disquiet the Christian's peace, for want of a right understanding here, he is soon worsted by his enemy; as the silly hare which might escape the dogs in some covert or burrow that is at hand, but, trusting to her heels, is by the print of her own feet and scent, which she leaves behind, followed, till at last, weary and spent, she falls into the mouth of them. In all that a Christian doth there is a print of sinful infirmity, and a scent by which Satan is enabled to trace and pursue him over hedge and ditch; this grace and that duty, till the soul, not able to stand before the accusation of Satan, is ready to fall down in despair at his feet; whereas here is a hiding-place, whither the enemy durst not come, the clefts of the rock, the hole of the stairs, which this truth leads unto. When Satan chargeth thee for a sinner, perhaps thou interposest thy repentance and reformation, but soon art beaten out of those works, when thou art shewn the sinful mixtures that are in them; whereas this truth will choke all his bullets, that thou believest on him who hath said, 'Not unto him that worketh, but to him that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is imputed for righteousness,' Rom. iv. 5. Get, therefore, into this tower of the gospel covenant, and roll this truth, as she that stone on the head of Abimelech, on the head of Satan.

Section III.—Thirdly, Be sure, Christian, thou keepest thy plains. Take heed that Satan coop thee not up in some straits, where thou canst neither well fight nor fly. Such a trap the Egyptians hoped they had the Israelites in when they cried, 'They are entangled, they are entangled.' There are three kinds of straits where he labours to entrap the Christian; nice questions, obscure scriptures, and dark providences.

First, He labours to puzzle him with nice and scrupulous questions, on purpose to retard the work, and clog him in his motion, that, meeting with such intricacies in his Christian course, which he cannot easily resolve, thereby he may be made either to give over, or go on heavily; therefore we have particular charge not to trouble the weak heads of young converts with 'doubtful disputations,' Rom. xiv. 1. Sometimes Satan will be asking the soul how it knows its election; and where he finds one not so fully resolved as to dare to own the same, he frames his argument against such a one's closing with Christ and the promise; as if it were presumption to assume that (which is the only portion of the elect), before we know ourselves of that number. Now, Christian, keep the plains, and thou art safe. It is plain we are not to make election a ground for our faith, but our faith and calling a medium or argument to prove our election.

Digitized by Google

Election indeed is first in order of divine acting,—God chooseth before we believe; yet faith is first in our acting,—we must believe before we can know we be elected; yea, by believing we know it. The husbandman knows it is spring by the sprouting of the grass, though he hath no astrology to know the position of the heavens; thou mayest know thou art elect, as surely by a work of grace in thee, as if thou hadst stood by God's elbow when he writ thy name in the book of life. It had been presumption for David to have thought he should have been king, till Samuel anointed him; but than none at all: when thou believest first, and closest with Christ, then is the Spirit of God sent to anoint thee to the kingdom of heaven; this is that holy oil which is poured upon none but heirs of glory; and it is no presumption to read what God's gracious purpose was towards thee of old, when he prints those his thoughts, and makes them legible in thy effectual calling; here thou dost not go up to heaven, and pry into God's secrets, but heaven comes down to thee, and reveals them. Again, he will ask the Christian what was the time of his conversion; art thou a Christian, will he say, and dost thou not know when thou commencedst? Now keep the plains, and content thyself with this, that thou seest the streams of grace, though the time of thy conversion be like the head of Nilus, not to be found. God oft comes betimes, before gross sins have defloured the soul, and steals into the creature's bosom without much noise. In such a case Satan doth but abuse thee, when he sends thee on his errand; you may know the sun is up, though you did not observe when it rose. Again what will become of thee, saith Satan, if God should bring thee into such an affliction or trial, when thou must burn or turn, or when all thy outward estate shall be rent from thee, no meal in the barrel, or money in the purse? darest thou have so good an opinion of thyself, as to think that thy faith will hold out in such an hour of temptation? If thou hast but half an eye, Christian, thou mayst see what Satan drives at; this is an ensnaring question; by the fear of future troubles he labours to bring thee into a neglect of thy present duty, and indispose thee also for such a state, whenever it falls. If a man hath much business to do on the morrow, it is his wisdom to discharge his mind thereof, when composing to sleep, lest the thoughts thereof break his rest, and make him the more unfit in the morning. The less rest the soul hath in God and his promise concerning future events, the less strength it will find to bear them when the pinch comes. When, therefore, thou art molested with such fears, pacify thy heart with these three plain conclusions:

First, Every event is the product of God's providence; not a sparrow, much less a saint, falls to the ground by poverty, sickness, persecution, &c., but the hand of God is in it.

Secondly, God hath put in a caution, 'he will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5. He that enables thee in one condition will in another. God learns his servants their whole trade. Grace is an universal principle. At the first moment of thy spiritual life, suffering grace was infused as well as praying grace.

Thirdly, God is wise to conceal the succours he intends in the several changes of thy life, that so he may draw thy heart into an entire dependence on his faithful promise. Thus, to try the metal of Abraham's faith, he let him go on till his hand was stretched forth, and then he comes to his rescue. Christ sends his disciples to sea, but stays behind himself, on a design to try their faith, and shew his love. Comfort thyself, therefore, with this; though thou seest not thy God in the way, yet thou shalt find him in the end.

Secondly, Satan perplexes the tender consciences of doubting Christians with obscure scriptures, whose sense lies too deep for their weak and distempered fragments readily to find out, and with these he hampers poor souls exceedingly; indeed, as melancholy men delight in melancholy walks, so doubting souls most frequent such places of scripture in their musing thoughts, as increase their doubts; how many have I known that have looked so long on those difficult places, Heb. vi. 7, and x. 26, which pass the understanding as a swift stream the eye, so that the sense is not perceived without great observation, till their heads have turned round, and they at last, not able to untie the difficulties, have fallen down into despairing thoughts and words of their own condition, crying out

Digitized by Google

O they have sinned against knowledge of the truth, and therefore no mercy remains for them! who, if they would have refreshed their understandings by looking off these places, whose engraving is too curious to be long pored on by a weak eye, they might have found that in other scriptures plainly expressed, which would have enabled them, as through a glass, more safely to have viewed these. Therefore, Christian, keep the plains; thou mayest be sure it is thine enemy that gives thee such stones to break thy teeth, when thy condition calls rather for bread and wine, such scriptures, I mean, as are most apt to nourish thy faith, and cheer thy drooping spirit. When thou meetest such plain scriptures which speak to thy case, go over where it is fordable, and do not venture beyond thy depth. Art thou afraid because thou hast sinned since the knowledge of the truth, and therefore no sacrifice remains for thee? See David and Peter's case, how it patterns thine, and left upon record that their recovery may be a key in thine hand to open such places as these; mayest thou not safely conclude from these, this is not their meaning, that none can be saved that sin after knowledge? Indeed, in both these places, it is neither meant of the falls of such as ever had true grace, nor of a falling away in some particular acts of sin, but of a total universal falling away from the faith, (the doctrine of it as well as seeming practice of it.) Now, if the root of the matter were ever in thee, other scriptures will first comfort thee against those particular apostasies into which thou hast relapsed, by sweet promises inviting such to return, and precedents of saints, who have had peace spoken to them after such folly, and also they will satisfy thee against the other, by giving full security to thy faith, that thy little grace shall not die, being immortal, though not in its proper essence, because a creature, yet by covenant, as it is a child of promise.

Thirdly, Dark providences. From these Satan disputes against God's love to, and grace in a soul. First, he got a commission to plunder Job of his temporal estate, and bereave him of his children, and then labours to make him question his spiritual estate and sonship: his wife would have him entertain hard thoughts of God, saying, 'Curse God and die;' and his friends as hard thoughts of himself, as if he were an hypocrite, and both upon the same mistake, as if such an afflicted condition and a gracious state were inconsistent. Now, Christian, keep the plains, and neither from this charge God foolishly for thine enemy, nor thyself as his; read the saddest providence with the comment of the word, and thou canst not make such a harsh interpretation. As God can make a straight line with a crooked stick; be righteous when he useth wicked instruments; so also gracious when he dispenseth harsh providences. Joseph kept his love, when he spake roughly to his brethren. I do not wonder that the wicked think they have God's blessings, because they are in the warm sun: alas! they are strangers to God's counsels, void of his spirit, and sensual, judging of God and his providence by the report present feeling makes of them; like little children, who think every one loves them that gives them plums. But it is strange that a saint should be at a loss for his afflicted state, when he hath a key to decipher God's character: Christian, hath not God secretly instructed thee by his spirit from the word, how to read the short-hand of his providence? Dost not thou know that the saints' afflictions stand for blessings? 'Every son whom he loves he corrects;' and prosperity in a wicked state, must it not be read a curse? Doth not God damn such to be rich, honourable, victorious in this world, as well as to be tormented in another world? God gives them more of these than they seem to desire sometimes, and all to bind them faster up in a deep sleep of security, as Jael served Sisera, Judges v. 25; he shall have milk, though he asked but water, that she might nail him the surer to the ground; milk having a property, as some write, to incline to sleep.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, Be careful to keep thy old receipts which thou hast from God for the pardon of thy sins. There are some gaudy days and jubilee-like festivals, when God comes forth clothed with the robes of his mercy, and holds forth the sceptre of his grace more familiarly to his children than ordinary, bearing witness to their faith, sincerity, &c., and then the firmament is clear, not a cloud to be seen to darken the Christian's comfort. Love and joy are the soul's repast and pastime, while this feast lasts. Now when God with-

Digitized by Google

draws, and this cheer is taken off, Satan's work is, how he may deface and wear off the remembrance of this testimony, which the soul so triumphs in for its spiritual standing, that he may not have it as an evidence when he shall bring about the suit again, and put the soul to produce his writings for his spiritual state, or renounce his claim. It behoves thee, therefore, to lay them up safely: such a testimony may serve to non-suit thy accuser many years hence: one affirmative from God's mouth for thy pardoned state carries more weight, though of old date, than a thousand negatives from Satan's. 'David's songs of old' spring in with a light to his soul in his midnight sorrows.

Quest. But what counsel would you give me, saith the distressed soul, who cannot fasten on my former comforts, nor dare to avouch those evidences, which once I thought true? I find indeed there have been some treaties of old between God and my soul; some hopes I have had, but these are now so defaced and interlined with backslidings, repentances, and falls again, that now I question all my evidences, whether true or counterfeit: what shall one in this case do?

Ans. First. Renew thy repentance, as if thou hadst never repented. Put forth fresh acts of faith, as if thou hadst never believed. This, seriously done, will stop Satan's mouth with an unexpected answer. Let him object against thy former actings as hypocritical, what can he say against thy present repenting and believing, which, if true, sets thee beyond his shot? It will be harder for Satan to disprove the present workings of God's gracious Spirit, whilst the impressions thereof are fresh, than to pick a hole in thy old deeds and evidences. Acts are transient; and as wicked men look at sins committed many years since, as little or none, by reason of that breadth of time which interposeth, so the Christian upon the same account stands at great disadvantage, to take the true aspect of those acts of grace which so long ago passed between God and him, though sometimes even these are of great use. As God can make a sinner possess the sins of his youth, as if they were newly acted, to his terror in his old age, so God can present the comforts and evidences which of old the saint received, with those very thoughts he had then of them, as if they were fresh and new.

And therefore, Secondly, If he haunts thee with fears of thy spiritual estate, ply thee to the throne of grace, and beg a new copy of thy old evidence, which thou hast lost. The original is in the pardon office in heaven, whereof Christ is master; if thou art a saint, thy name is upon record in that court: make thy moan to God, hear what news from heaven, rather than listen to the tales which are brought by thine enemy from hell. Did such reason less with Satan, and pray over their fears more to God, they might sooner be resolved. Can you expect truth from a liar, and comfort from an enemy? Did he ever prophesy well of believers? Was not Job the devil's hypocrite, whom God vouched for a nonsuch in holiness, and proved him so at last? If he knew that thou wert a saint, would he tell thee so! If an hypocrite, he would be as loth thou shouldst know it; turn thy back therefore on him, and go to thy God; fear not, but sooner or later he will give his hand again to thy certificate. But look thou dost not pass rashly a censure on thyself, because a satisfactory answer is not presently sent at thy desire; the messenger may stay long, and bring good news at last.

Thirdly, Shun battle with thine enemy till thou art in a fitter posture; and that thou mayest draw into thy trenches, and make an honourable retreat into those fastnesses and strengths, which Christ hath provided for his sick and wounded soldiers. Now there are two places of advantage into which deserted souls may retire; the name of God, and the absolute promises of the gospel; these I may call the fair havens, which are then chiefly of use when the storm is so great, that the ship cannot live at sea. O, saith Satan, dost thou hope to see God? None but the pure in heart shall be blest with that vision. Thinkest thou to have comfort? That is the portion of the mourners in spirit. Now, soul, though thou canst not say, in the hurry of temptation, thou art the pure and the mourner in spirit, yet then say thou believest God is able to work these in thee, yea, hath promised such a mercy to poor sinners; it is his covenant, (he will give a new heart, a clean heart, a soft heart), and there I wait, knowing, as there was nothing in the creature to move the great God to make such promises,

Digitized by Google

so there can be nothing in the creature to hinder the Almighty his performance of them, where and when he pleaseth. This act of faith, accompanied with a longing desire after that grace thou canst not yet find, and an attendance on the means, though it will not fully satisfy all thy doubts, may be, yet will keep thy head above water, that thou despairest not; and such a shore thou needest in this case, or the house falls.

Fourthly, If yet Satan dogs thee, call in help, and keep not the devil's counsel. The very strength of some temptations lies in the concealing of them, and the very revealing of them to some faithful friend (like the opening and pricking of an imposthume), gives the soul present ease. Satan knows this too well; and therefore, as some thieves, when they come to rob an house, either gag them in it, or hold a pistol to their breast, frighting them with death, if they cry or speak; thus Satan, that he may the more freely rifle the soul of its peace and comfort, overawes it so, that it dares not disclose its temptation. O, saith Satan, if thy brethren or friends know such a thing by thee, they will cast thee off, others will hoot at thee. Thus many a poor soul hath been kept long in its pangs by biting them in: thou losest, Christian, a double help by keeping the devil's secret, the counsel and prayers of thy fellow-brethren; and what an invaluable loss is this!

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE SAINTS' VICTORY OVER THEIR SUBTLE ENEMY, AND WHENCE IT IS THAT CREATURES SO OVERMATCHED SHOULD BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST SATAN'S WILES.

THE second branch of the apostle's argument follows, to excite them the more vigorously to their arms, and that is from the possibility, yea, certainty of standing against this subtle enemy, if thus armed, 'That ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. So that this gives the apostle's argument its due temperament; for he meant not to scare them into a cowardly flight, or sullen despair of victory, when he tells them their enemy is so subtle and politic; but to excite them to a vigorous resistance, from the assured hope of strength to stand in battle, and victoriously after it; which two I conceive are comprehended in that phrase, standing against the wiles of Satan. Sometimes 'to stand' implies a fighting posture; so verse 14. Sometimes a conquering posture, Job xix. 25: 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.' That earth, which was the field where all the bloody battles were fought between him and Satan, on it shall he stand, when not an enemy shall dare to shew his head. So that taking both these in, the observation is,

Doct. Satan with all his wits and wiles shall never vanquish a soul armed with true grace; nay, he that hath this armour of God on, shall vanquish him. Look into the word, you shall not find a saint but hath been in the list with him, sifted and winnowed more or less by this enemy, yet at last we find them all coming off with an honourable victory; as in David, Job, Peter, Paul, who were the hardest put to it of any upon record; and lest some should attribute their victory to the strength of their inherent grace, above other of their weaker brethren, you have the glory of victories appropriated to God, in whom the weak are as strong as the strongest, 2 Cor. xii. 9: James v. 21. We shall give a double reason of this truth, why the Christian, who seems to be so overmatched, is yet so unconquerable.

Reas. 1. First, the curse that lies upon Satan and his cause. God's curse blasts wherever it comes. The Canaanites with their neighbour-nations were 'bread for Israel,' though people famous for war; and why?—they were cursed nations. The Egyptians a politic people; 'Let us deal wisely,' say they; yet being cursed of God, this lay like a thorn at their heart, and was at last their ruin; yea, let the Israelites themselves, (who carry the badge of God's covenant on their flesh), by their sins once become the people of God's curse, and they are trampled like dirt under the Assyrian's foot. This made Balak beg so hard for a curse upon Israel. Now there is an irrevocable curse cleaves to Satan from Isa. x. 5; Gen. iii. 14, 15: 'And the Lord said to the serpent, Because thou

Digitized by Google

hast done this, thou art cursed,' &c., which place, though partly meant of the literal serpent, yet chiefly of the devil and the wicked (his spiritual serpentine brood), as appears by the enmity pronounced against the serpent's seed and the woman's, which clearly holds forth the feud between Christ with his seed, against the devil and his. Now there are two things in that curse which may comfort the saints. First, the curse prostrates Satan under their feet: 'Upon thy belly shalt thou go,' which is no more than is elsewhere promised, that God 'will subdue Satan under our feet.' Now this prostrate condition of Satan assures believers that the devil shall never lift his head (that is, his wily policy) higher than the saint's heel. He may make thee limp, but not bereave thee of thy life; and this bruise which he gives thee shall be rewarded with the 'breaking' of his 'own head,' that is, the utter ruin of him and his cause. Secondly, his food is here limited and appointed. Satan shall not devour whom he will. The 'dust' is his food, which seems to restrain his power to the wicked, who are of the earth earthy, mere dust; but for those who are of a heavenly extraction, their graces are reserved for Christ's food, Cant. vii. 13, and their souls surely are not a morsel for the devil's tooth.

The second reason is taken from the wisdom of God, who, as he undertakes the ordering of the Christian's way to heaven, Ps. xxxvii. 24, so especially this business of Satan's temptations. We find Christ was not led of the evil spirit into the wilderness to be tempted, but of the Holy Spirit, Matt. iv. 1. Satan tempts not when he will, but when God pleaseth; and the same Holy Spirit which led Christ into the field, brought him off with victory. And therefore we find him marching in 'the power of the Spirit' (after he had repulsed Satan) into Galilee, Luke iv. 14. When Satan tempts a saint, he is but God's messenger, 2 Cor. xii. 7: 'There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me;' so our translation. But rather as Beza, who will have it *in casu recto*, the messenger Satan, implying that he was sent of God to Paul, and indeed the errand he came about was too good and gracious to be his own, 'Lest I should be exalted above measure.' The devil never meant to do Paul such a good office; but God sends him to Paul, as David sent Uriah with letters to Joab,—neither knew the contents of their message. The devil and his instruments both are God's instruments, therefore the wicked are called his sword, his axe, Ps. xvii. 13; Isa. x. 15; now let God alone to wield the one, and handle the other. He is but a bungler that hurts and hackles his own legs with his own axe; which God should do if his children should be the worse for Satan's temptations. Let the devil choose his way, God is for him at every weapon. If he will try it by force of arms, and assaults the saints by persecution, as 'the Lord of hosts' he will oppose him. If by policy and subtilty, he is ready there also. The devil and his whole council are but fools to God; nay, their wisdom foolishness. Cunning and art commend every thing but sin. The more artificial the watch, the picture, &c., the better; but the more wit and art in sin, the worse, because it is employed against an all-wise God, that cannot be outwitted, and therefore will in the end but pay the workman in greater damnation. 'The foolishness of God is wiser than man,' yea, than the wisdom of men and devils, that is, the means and instruments which God opposeth Satan withal. What weaker than a sermon? who sillier than the saints in the account of the wise world? yet God is wiser in a weak sermon than Satan in his deep plots (wherein the state-heads of a whole conclave of profound cardinals are knocked together;) wiser in his simple ones, than Satan in his Ahithophels and Sanballats; and truly God chooseth on purpose to defeat the policies of hell and earth by these, that he may put such to greater shame, 1 Cor. i. 21. How is the great scholar ashamed to be baffled by a plain countryman's argument? thus God calls forth Job to wrestle with Satan and his seconds (for such his three friends shewed themselves in taking the devil's part); and sure he is not able to hold up the cudgels against the fencing-master, who is beaten by one of his scholars. God sits laughing, while hell and earth sit plotting, Ps. ii. 4: "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty,' he breaketh their studied thoughts and plots, as the words import, Job v. 12; in one moment pulling down the labours of many years' policy. Indeed, as great men keep wild beasts for game and sport (as the fox, the

Digitized by Google

boar, &c.), so doth God Satan and his instruments, to manifest his wisdom in the taking of them. It is observed, that the very hunting of some beasts affords not only pleasure to the hunter, but also more sweetness to the eater. Indeed, God, by displaying of his wisdom in the pursuit of his saints' enemies, doth superadd a sweet relish to their deliverances at last. 'He brake the heads of the Leviathan in pieces, and gave him to be meat to his people.' After he had hunted Pharaoh out of all his forms and burrows, now he breaks the very brains of all his plots, and serves him up to his people with the garnishment of his wisdom and power about.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ACCOUNT IS GIVEN HOW THE ALL-WISE GOD DOTH OUTWIT THE DEVIL IN HIS TEMPTING OF SAINTS TO SIN; WHEREIN ARE LAID DOWN THE ENDS SATAN PROPOUNDS, AND HOW HE IS PREVENTED IN ALL, WITH THE GRACIOUS ISSUE THAT GOD PUTS TO THESE HIS TEMPTATIONS.

Quest. 'But how doth God defeat Satan, and outwit his wiles in tempting his saints?'

Answ. This God doth by accomplishing his own gracious ends for the good and comfort of his people, out of those temptations from which Satan designs their ruin; this is the noblest kind of conquest, to beat back the devil's weapon to the wounding of his own head, yea, to cut it off with the devil's own sword; thus God sets the devil to catch the devil, and lays, as it were, his own counsels under Satan's wings, and makes him hatch them. Thus the patriarchs helped to fulfil Joseph's dream, while they are thinking to rid their hands of him. To instance in a few particulars.

SECTION I.—First, Satan by his temptations aims at the defiling of the Christian's conscience, and disfiguring that beautiful face of God's image, which is engraven with holiness in the Christian's bosom; he is an unclean spirit himself, and would have them such, that he might glory in their shame; but God outwits him, for he turneth the temptations of Satan to sin, to the purging them from sin; they are the black soap with which God washeth his saints white.

First, God useth the temptations of Satan to one sin, as a preventive against another; so 'Paul's thorn in the flesh,' to prevent his pride. God sends Satan to assault Paul on that side where he is strong, that in the meantime he may fortify him where he is weak. Thus Satan is befooled; as sometimes we see an army sitting down before a town, where it wastes its strength to no purpose; and in the meantime gives the enemy an advantage to recruit, and all this by the counsel of some Hushai, that is a secret friend to the contrary side. God, who is the saint's true friend, sits in the devil's counsel, and overrules proceedings there to the saint's advantage; he suffers the devil to annoy the Christian with temptations to blasphemy, atheism; and by these, together with the troubles of spirit they produce, the soul is driven to duty, is humbled in the sense of these horrid apparitions in its imagination, and secured from abundance of formality and pride, which otherwise God saw invading him. As in a family, some business falls out which keeps the master up later than ordinary, and by this the thief, who that night intended to rob him, is disappointed; had not such a soul had his spirit of prayer and diligence kept awake by those afflicting temptations, it is likely Satan might have come as a seducer, and taken him napping in security.

Secondly, God purgeth out the very sin Satan tempts to, even by his tempting. Peter never had such a conquest over his self-confidence, never such an establishment of his faith, as after his foul fall in the high priest's hall. He that was so well persuaded of himself before, as to say, Though all were offended with Christ, yet would not he; how modest and humble was he in a few days become, when he durst not say he loved Christ more than his fellow-brethren, to whom before he had preferred himself? What an undaunted confessor of Christ and his gospel doth he prove before councils and rulers, who even now was dashed out of countenance by a silly maid? and all this the product of Satan's temptation sanctified unto him. Indeed, a saint hath a discovery by his fall, what is the prevailing corruption in him; so that the

Digitized by Google

temptation doth but stir humour, which the soul, having found out, hath the greater advantage to evacuate, by applying those means, and using those ingredients which do purge that malady, *cum delectu*. Now the soul will call all out against this destroyer; Paul had not took such pains to 'buffet his body,' had he not found Satan knocking at that door.

Thirdly, God useth these temptations for the advancing of the whole work of grace in the heart. One spot occasions the whole garment to be washed. David, overcome with one sin, renews his repentance for all, Psalm li. A good husband, when he seeth it rain in at one place, sends for the workmen to look over all the house. This indeed differenceth a sincere heart from an hypocrite, whose repentance is partial, soft in one plot, and hard in another. Judas cries out of his treason, but not a word of his thievery and hypocrisy. The hole was no wider in his conscience than where the bullet went in; whereas true sorrow for one breaks the heart into shivers for others also.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Satan, by tempting one saint, hath a mischievous design against others, either by encouraging them to sin by the example of such a one, or discouraging them in their holy course by the scandal he hath given; but God here befools him.

First, Making the miscarriages of such a seasonable caveat to others to look to their standing. Dost thou see a meek Moses provoked to anger? What watch and ward hast thou need keep over thy unruly heart! Though loud winds do some hurt by blowing down here a loose tile, and there a turret (which was falling before), yet the common good surmounts the private damage of some few; these being as a broom in God's hand to sweep and cleanse the air; so, though some (that are wicked) are by God's righteous judgment for the same hardened into further abominations by the saints' falls, yet the good which sincere souls receive by having their formality and security in a further degree purged, doth abundantly countervail the other, who are but sent a little faster whither they were going before.

Secondly, God makes his saints' falls an argument for comfort to distressed consciences. This hath been, and is as a feather (when the passage seems so stopped that no comfort can be got down otherwise) to drop a little hope into the soul, to keep the creature alive from falling into utter despair; some have been revived with this when next door to hell in their own fears. David's sin was great, yet found mercy; Peter fell foully, yet now in heaven. Why sittest thou here, O my soul, under the hatches of despair? Up, and call upon thy God for mercy, who hath pardoned the same to others.

Thirdly, God hath a design in suffering Satan to trounce some of his saints by temptation, to train them up into a fitness to succour their fellow-brethren in the like condition: he sends them hither to school (where they are under Satan's ferula and lash), that his cruel hand over them may make them study the word and their own hearts, by which they get experience of Satan's policies, till at last they commence masters in this art of comforting tempted souls. It is an art by itself, 'to speak a word in season to the weary soul:' it is not serving out an apprenticeship to human arts will furnish a man for this: great doctors have proved great dunces here, knowing no more how to handle a wounded conscience, than a rustic the surgeon's instrument in dissecting the body when an anatomical lecture is to be read. It is not the knowledge of the Scripture (though a man were as well acquainted with it as an apothecary with his pots and glasses in his shop, able to go directly to any promise on a sudden) will suffice. No, not grace itself, except exercised with these buffetings and soul-conflicts. Christ himself we find trained up in this school, Isa. l. 4: 'He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.' Even as the tutor calls up his pupil to read to him; and what is the lecture which is read to Christ, that he may have the tongue of the learned to speak a word in season to the weary soul? see verse 5. 'The Lord hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned I away my back; I gave my back to the smiters,' &c. His sufferings, which were all along mingled with temptations) were the lecture from which Christ came out so learned, to resolve and comfort distressed souls. So that the devil had better have let Christ alone, yea, and his saints also, who do him but the greater disservice in comforting others; none will handle poor souls so gently as those who remember

Digitized by Google

the smart of their own heart-sorrows: none so skilful in applying the comforts of the word to wounded consciences, as those who have lain bleeding themselves; such know the symptoms of soul-trouble, and feel others' pains in their own bosoms, which some that know the Scriptures (for lack of experience) do not, and therefore are like a novice physician, who perhaps can tell you every plant in the herbal, yet, wanting the practical part, when a patient comes, knows not well how to make use of his skill. The saints' experiences help them to a sovereign ointment made of the scorpion's own flesh (which they through Christ have slain), and that hath a virtue above all other to expel the venom of Satan's temptations from the heart.

Section III.—Thirdly, Satan, in tempting the saint to sin, labours to make a breach between God and the soul. He hates both, and therefore labours to divide these dear friends. If I can (thinks he) get such a one to sin, God will be angry, and when angry, he will whip his child soundly, this will be some sport; and when God is correcting the saint, he will be questioning the love of God to him, and cool in his love to God; so, though I should not keep him from heaven at last, yet he shall have little joy in the way thither. In his case, God and the soul will be like a man and wife fallen out, who neither of them look kindly one upon another. Now see how God befools Satan in both these.

First, God useth his saints' temptations as his method by which he advanceth the communications of his love unto them. The devil thought he had got the goal, when he got Adam to eat the forbidden fruit; he thought now he had men in the same predicament with himself, as unlikely ever to see the face of God as those apostate spirits: but, alas! this was by God intended to usher in that great gospel plot of saving man by Christ, who (as soon as this prologue of man's fall is done) is brought upon the stage in that grand promise of the gospel made to Adam, and at God's command undertakes the charge of recovering lost man out of Satan's clutches, and reinstating him in his primitive glory, with an accession of more than ever man had at first, so that the meanest lily in Christ's field exceeds Adam in all his native royalty. And as Satan sped in his first temptation, so he is still on the losing hand: what got he by all his pains upon Job, but to let that holy man know at last how dearly God loved him! When he foiled Peter so shamefully, do we not find Christ owning Peter with as much love as ever? Peter must be the only disciple to whom by name the joyful news of the resurrection is sent: 'Go tell my disciples and Peter;' as if Christ had said, Be sure let his sad heart be comforted with this news, that he may know I am friends with him for all his late cowardice.

Quest. But doth not this seem to countenance sin, and make Christians heedless whether they fall into temptation or no? If God does thus show his love to his saints after their falls and foils, why should we be so shy of sin, which ends so well at last?

Answ. Two things will prevent the danger of such an inference.

First, we must distinguish between a soul's being foiled through his own infirmity, and his enemies' subtilty and power over-matching him, and another, who through a false heart doth voluntarily prostrate himself to the lust of Satan; though a general will shew little pity to a soldier that should traitorously throw down his arms and run to the enemy, yet if another in fighting receives a wound and be worsted, it will be no dishonour for him to express his pity and love, no, though he should send him out of the field in his own coach, lay him in his own bed, and appoint him his own surgeon. God doth not encourage wickedness in a saint, but pities weakness. Even when the saints fall into a sin in its nature presumptuous, they do not commit it so presumptuously as others; there is a part true to God in their bosoms, though overvoted. Moses spake unadvisedly, but the devil had his instruments to provoke him, quite against the good man's temper. David numbers the people, but see how the devil dogged and hunted him, till at last he get the better, 1 Chron. xxi. 1: 'Satan stood up, and provoked David to number Israel.' How bravely did Job repel Satan's darts! No wonder if in such a shower some one should get between the joints of his armour. And for Peter, we know with what a loyal heart, yea, zealous, he went into the field, though, when the enemy appeared, his heart failed him.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Consider but the way how God communicates his love after the saints' fall; not in sinning, or for sinning, but in mourning and humbling their souls for their sins. Indeed did God smile on them while acting sinfully, this might strengthen their sin, as wine in a fever would the disease; but when the fit is off, the venom of the disease spent, and breathed out in a kindly humiliation, now the creature lies low. God's wine and comfort is a cordial to the drooping spirit, not fuel for sin. When David was led into temptation, first he must be clad in sackcloth and mourning, and then God takes it off, and puts on the garment of joy and praise, 1 Chron. xxi. 10, 15. Job, though he expressed so much courage and patience, yet (bewraying some infirmities after he was baited long by so many fresh dogs, men, and devils) he must cry peccavi, and abhor himself in dust and ashes, before God will take him into his arms, Job xlii. 6; and the same way God takes with all his children. Now to his saints in such a posture, God may with safety, to his honour and their good, give a larger draught of his love than ordinary; their fears and sorrow, which their sin hath cost them, will serve instead of water to dash this strong wine of joy, and take away its headiness, that it neither fume up into pride, nor occasion them to reel backward into apostasy.

Quest. But why doth God now communicate his love?

Answ. First, from his pitiful nature: 'You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.' God loves not to rake in bleeding wounds; he knows a mourning soul is subject to be discouraged. A frown or angry look from God, whom the saint so dearly loves, must needs go near the heart, therefore God declares himself at hand to revive such, Isa. lvii. 15; and he gives the reason, ver. 16: 'For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wrath, for the spirit should fail before me.' Whose spirit is there meant? Not of the presumptuous sinner; he goes on, and never blinks; but of the contrite and humble ones. As the father observes the disposition of his children; one commits a fault and goes on rebelliously, despising his father's anger; another, when offending, lays it to heart, refuseth to eat, gets into some corner to lament the displeasure of his father: the father sees it, and his bowels yearn towards him. Indeed, should he not put his child out of fear, by discovering his love, the spirit of such a one would fail; it is not possible there should be a long breach between such a father, and such a son; the one relenting over his sin, the other over his mourning son.

Secondly, God doth thus, to pour the greater shame upon Satan, who is the great mischief-maker between God and the soul. How is the man ashamed that hath stirred up variance between husband and wife, father and son, to see the breach made up, and all set themselves against him! It went ill on Christ's side, when Herod and Pilate were made friends; and can it go well with Satan to see all well between God and his children? If Esther be in favour, Haman her enemy shall have his face covered. Indeed, this covers Satan's face with shame, to see a poor saint even now his prisoner, whom he had leave to rob and plunder, tempt and disquiet, now sitting in the sunshine of God's love, while he like a ravening lion takes on for the loss of his prey.

Secondly, Satan's aim is, to weaken the saint's faith on God, and cool his love to God, but befooled in both; for, First, God turns their temptations, yea, their falls, to the further establishment of their faith, which, like the tree, stands stronger for its shaking, or like the giant Anteus, who in his wrestling with Hercules is feigned to get strength by every fall to the ground. False faith, indeed, once foiled, seldom comes on again; but true faith rises and fights more valiantly, as we see in Peter and other Scripture examples. Temptation to faith is as fire to gold, 1. Pet. i. 7. The fire doth not only discover which is true gold, but makes the true gold more pure; it comes out may be less in bulk and weight, because severed from that soil and dross which embased it, but more in value and worth. When Satan is bound up, and the Christian walks under the light of Divine favour, and encouragement of Divine assistance, his faith may appear great, if compared with another under the withdrawings of God, and buffetings of Satan; but this is not equal judgment; as if to try who is biggest of two men, we should measure one naked, and the other over his

Digitized by Google

clothes; or in comparing two pieces of gold, weigh one with the dross and dirt it contracts in the purse, with the other purged from these in the fire: faith before temptation hath much heterogeneal stuff in it, that cleaves to it, and goes for faith; but when temptation comes, these are discovered. Now the Christian feels corruption stir, which lay as dead before; now a cloud comes between the soul and the sweet face of God, the sense of which latter, and the little sense of the other, bore up his face before; but these bladders pricked, he comes now to learn the true stroke of this heavenly art of swimming on the promise, having nothing else to bear him up but that; and a little of this carries more of the precious nature of faith in it than all the other, yea, is, like Gideon's handful of men, stronger, when all these accessaries to faith are sent away, than when they were present; and here is all the devil gets; instead of destroying his faith, which he aims at, he is the occasion of the refining of it, and thereby adding to its strength.

Secondly, The love of tempted saints is enkindled to Christ by their temptations, and foils in their temptations. Possibly in the fit there may seem a damp upon their love, as when water is first sprinkled upon the fire; but when the conflict is a little over, and the Christian comes to himself, his love to Christ will break out like a vehement flame. First, the shame and sorrow which a gracious soul must needs feel in his bosom for his sinful miscarriage, while under the temptation, will provoke him to express his love to Christ above others, as is sweetly set forth in the spouse, who, when the cold fit of her distemper was off, and the temptation over, bestirs her to purpose; her lazy sickness was turned to love sickness; she finds it as hard now to sit, as she did before to rise; she can rest in no place out of her beloved's sight, but runs and asks every one she meets for him. And whence came all this vehemency of her zeal? All occasioned by her undutiful carriage to her husband: she parted so unkindly with him, that, bethinking what she had done, away she goes to make her peace. If sins committed in unregeneracy have such a force upon a gracious soul, that the thought of them, though pardoned, will still break and melt the heart into sorrow, as we see in Magdalen, and prick on to show zeal for God above others, as in Paul, how much more will the sins of a saint, who, after sweet acquaintance with Jesus Christ, lifts up the heel against that bosom where he hath lain, affect, yea, dissolve the heart, as into so many drops of water, and that sorrow provoke him to serve God at a higher rate than others? No child so dutiful in all the family, as he who is returned from his rebellion. Again, Secondly, As his own shame, so the experience which such a one hath of Christ's love above others, will increase his love. Christ's love is fuel to ours. *Ex eisdem nutrimur quibus constamus;* as it gives its being, so it affords growth; it is both mother and nurse to our love. The more Christ puts forth his love, the more heat our love gets; and next to Christ's dying love, none greater than his succouring love in temptation. The mother never hath such advantage to show her affection to her child, as when in distress, sick, poor, or imprisoned; so neither hath Christ to his children, as when tempted, yea, worsted by temptation. When his children lie in Satan's prison, bleeding under the wounds of their consciences, this is the season he takes to give an experiment of his tender heart in pitying, his faithfulness in praying for them, his mindfulness in sending succour to them; yea, his dear love in visiting them by his comforting Spirit. Now when the soul hath got off some great temptation, and reads the whole history thereof together,—wherein he finds what his own weakness was to resist Satan, nay, his unfaithfulness in complying with Satan, which might have provoked Christ to leave him to the fury of Satan,—now to see both his folly pardoned, and ruin graciously prevented, and that by no other hand but Christ's coming in to his rescue, as Abishai to David, 2 Sam. xxi., when that giant thought to have slain him, this must needs exceedingly endear Christ to the soul. At the reading of such records, the Christian cannot but inquire, as Ahasuerus concerning Mordecai,—who, by discovering a treason, had saved the king's life,—what honour hath been done to his sweet Saviour for all this? And thus Jesus Christ, whom Satan thought to bring out of the soul's favour and liking, comes in the end to sit higher and surer in the saint's affection than ever.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X.

A BRIEF APPLICATION OF THE POINT IN TWO BRANCHES.

Use 1. THIS affords a reason why God suffers his dear children to fall into temptation, because he is able to outshoot Satan in his own bow, and, in the thing wherein he thinks to outwit the Christian, to be above him. God will not only be admired by his saints in glory for his love in their salvation, but for his wisdom in the way to it. The love of God in saving them will be the sweet draught at the marriage feast, and the rare wisdom of God in effecting this, as the curious workmanship with which the cup shall be enamelled. Now wisdom appears most in untying of knots, and wading through difficulties. The more cross wards there are in a business, the more wisdom to fit a key to the lock, to make choice of such means as shall meet with the several turnings in the same. On purpose, therefore, doth God suffer such temptations to intervene, that his wisdom may be the more admired in opening all these, and leading his saints that way to glory, by which Satan thought to have brought them to hell. The Israelites are bid 'remember all the way that God led them in the wilderness for forty years,' Deut. viii. 2. The history of these wars, Christian, will be pleasant to read in heaven, though bloody to fight on earth. Moses and Elias talked with Christ on Tabor, (an emblem of the sweet communion which shall pass between Christ and his saints in glory); and what was their talk, Luke ix. 30, but of his death and sufferings? It seems a discourse of our sufferings and temptations are not too low a subject for that blissful state. Indeed, this left out would make a blemish in the fair face of heaven's glory. Could the damned forget the way they went into hell, how oft the Spirit of God was wooing, and how far they were overcome by the conviction of it; in a word, how many turns and returns there were in their journey forward and backward; what possibilities, yea, probabilities, they had for heaven, when on earth; were but some hand so kind as to blot these tormenting passages out of their memories, it would ease them wonderfully. So, were it possible glorified saints could forget the way wherein they went to glory, and the several dangers that intervened from Satan, and their own backsliding hearts, they, and their God too, would be losers by it; I mean in regard of his manifestative glory. What is the glory wherein God appears at Zion's deliverance—those royal garments of salvation that make him admired of men and angels—but the celebration of all his attributes, according to what every one hath done towards their salvation? Now wisdom being that which the creature chiefly glories in, and chosen by Satan for his first bait, who made Eve believe she should be like God in knowledge and wisdom; therefore God, to give Satan the more shameful fall, gives him leave to use his wits and wiles in tempting and troubling his children, in which lies his great advantage over the saints, that so the way to his own throne, where his wisdom shall at last, as well as his mercy, sit in all its royalty, may be paved with the skulls, as I may so speak, of devils.

Secondly, This gives a strong cordial to our fainting faith, in the behalf of the church of Christ. If all the devil's wits and wiles will not serve him to overcome one single soldier in Christ's camp, much less shall he ever ruin the whole army. These are days of great confusions in the Christian world; and the chief fear of a gracious heart is for the ark, lest that should fall into the enemy's hand, and when this palladium is taken, the city of God (his church) be trod under the feet of pride. I confess Satan seems to get ground daily; he hath strangely wriggled into the bosoms and principles of many, who, by the fame of their profession and zeal, had obtained, in the opinion of others, to be reckoned among the chief of Christ's worthies in their generation. He hath sadly corrupted the truths of Christ, brought a discesteem on ordinances, that by this, and as a judgment for this, the womb of the gospel is become in a great measure barren, and her children, which hang about her breasts, thrive not in love and holiness as of old, when the milk was not so much nor that so spiritful; he hath had advantage by the divisions of the godly, to harden those that are wicked into a further disdain of religion, and by the bloody wars of late years, to boil up the wrath of the popish and profane crew to a higher

Digitized by Google

pitch of rage and fury against Christ's little remnant than ever; so that if ever God should suffer the sword to fall into their hand, they are disciplined and fitted to play the bloody butchers on Christ's sheep above their forefathers; neither are they so crest-fallen, but that they can hope for such a day, yea, take up some of those joys upon trust aforehand to solace themselves, while the rest follow. And now, Christian, may be their confidence, together with the distracted state of Christ's affairs in the world, may discompose thy spirit concerning the issue of these rolling providences that are over our heads; but be still, poor heart, and know that the contest is not between the church and Satan, but between Christ and him: these are the two champions. Stand now, O ye army of saints, still by faith, to see the all-wise God wrestle with the subtle devil. If you live not to see the period of these great confusions, yet generations after you shall behold the Almighty smite off this Goliath's head with his own sword, and take this cunning hunter in the toil of his own policies; that faith, which ascribes greatness and wisdom to God, will shrink up Satan's subtilty into a *nigrum nihil*, a thing of nothing. *Increduli timent diabolum, quasi leonem, qui fide fortes despiciunt quasi vermiculum.*—Bern. Unbelief fears Satan as a lion; faith treads on him as a worm. Behold, therefore, thy God at work, and promise thyself, that what he is about will be an excellent piece; none can drive him from his work. The pilot is beaten from the helm, and can do little in a storm but let the ship go adrift. The architect cannot work when night draws the curtain, yea, is driven off the scaffold with a storm of rain; such workmen are the wisest counsellors, and mightiest princes on earth. A pinch may come, when it is as vain to say, Help, O king, as Help, O beggar; man's wisdom may be levelled with folly, but God is never interrupted. All the plots of hell and commotions on earth, have not so much as shaked God's hand, to spoil one letter or line that he hath been drawing. The mysteriousness of his providence may hang a curtain before his work, that we cannot see what he is doing; but then 'when darkness is about him, righteousness is the seat of his throne for ever.' O where is our faith, sirs? let God be wise, and all men and devils fools. What, though thou seest a Babel more likely to go up, than a Babylon to be pulled down, yet believe God is making his secret approaches, and will clap his ladders on a sudden to the walls thereof. Suppose truth were prisoner with Joseph, and error the courtier, to have its head lift up by the favour of the times, yet dost not remember that the way to truth's perferment lies through the prison? yea, what though the church were like Jonah in the whale's belly, swallowed up to the eye of reason, by the fury of men; yet dost not remember the whale had not power to digest the prophet? O be not too quick to bury the church before she be dead. Stay while Christ tries his skill before you give it over; bring Christ by your prayers to its grave, to speak a resurrection word. Admirable hath the saints' faith been in such straits; as Joseph's, who pawned his bones that God would visit his brethren, willing them to lay him where he believed they should be brought. Jeremiah purchaseth a field of his uncle, and pays down the money for it; and this when the Chaldean army quartered about Jerusalem, ready to take the city, and carry him with the rest into Babylon! and all this by God's appointment, Jer. xxii. 6—8, that he might show the Jews by this, how undoubtedly he, in that sad juncture of time, did believe the performance of the promise for their return out of captivity. Indeed God counts himself exceedingly disparaged in the thoughts of his people (though at the lowest ebb of his church's affairs), if his naked word, and the single bond of his promise, will not be taken as sufficient security to their faith for its deliverance.

EPHES. vi. 12.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places.

THE words are coupled to the precedent with that casual particle *for*, which either refers to the two foregoing verses, and then they are a further reason, pressing the necessity of Christian fortitude in the tenth verse, and furniture in the

Digitized by Google

eleventh; or else to the last words of the eleventh verse, where the apostle, having descried the saints' grand enemy to be Satan, and described him in one of his attributes, his wily subtilty, he in this further displays him in his proper colours, not to weaken the saints' hands, but waken their care, that seeing their enemy marching up in a full body, they might stand in better order to receive his charge. Where, by the way, we may observe the apostle's simplicity and plain dealing; he doth not undervalue the strength of the enemy, and represent him inconsiderable, as captains use to keep their soldiers together by slighting the power of their adversary; no, he tells them the worst at first. If Satan had been to set out his own power, he could have challenged no more than is here granted him. See here the difference between Christ dealing with his followers, and Satan with his. Satan dares not let sinners know who that God is they fight against; this were enough to breed a mutiny in the devil's camp. Silly souls, they are drawn into the field by a false report of God and his ways, and are kept there together with lies and fair tales; but Christ is not afraid to show his saints their enemy in all his power and principality, the weakness of God being stronger than the powers of hell.

CHAPTER I.

SHEWETH THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE HERE TO BE A CONTINUAL WRESTLING WITH SIN AND SATAN, AND THE PAUCITY OF THOSE WHO ARE TRUE WRESTLERS, AS ALSO HOW THE TRUE WRESTLERS SHOULD MANAGE THEIR COMBAT.

THE words contain a lively description of a bloody and lasting war between the Christian and his implacable enemy: in which we may observe,

First, The Christian's state in this life, set out by this word 'wrestling.'

Secondly, The assailants that appear in arms against the Christian, who are described; First, Negatively, 'Not flesh and blood:' or rather comparatively, not chiefly flesh and blood. Secondly, Positively, 'But against principalities, powers,' &c.

SECTION I.—For the first, the wrestling or conflicting state of a Christian in this life, is rendered observable here by a threefold circumstance.

First, The kind of combat which the Christian's state is here set out by, which though it be used sometimes for a wrestling of sport and recreation, yet here to set out the sharpness of the Christian's encounter; there are two things in wrestling that render it a sharper combat than others. First, Wrestling is not properly fighting against a multitude, but when one enemy singles out another, and enters the list with him, each exerting their whole force and strength against one another; as David and Goliath, when the whole armies stood as it were in a ring to behold the bloody issue of that duel. Now, this is more fierce than to fight in an army, where, though the battle be sharp and long, the soldier is not always engaged, but falls off when he hath discharged, and takes breath awhile; yea, possibly may escape without hurt or stroke, because there the enemy's aim is not at this or that man, but at the whole heap; but in wrestling one cannot escape so; he being the particular object of the enemy's fury, must needs be shaked and tried to purpose. Indeed the word signifies such a strife as makes the body shake again. Satan hath not only a general malice against the army of saints, but a spite against thee, John, thee, Joan; he will single thee out for his enemy. We find Jacob, when alone, a man wrestled with. As God delights to have private communion with his single saints, so the devil to try it hand to hand with the Christian, when he gets him alone. As we lose much comfort when we do not apply the promise and providence of God to our particular persons and conditions; God loves me, pardons me, takes care of me; the water at the town-conduit doth me no good, if I want a pipe to empty it into my cistern; so it obstructs our care and watchfulness, when we conceive of Satan's wrath and fury as bent in general against the saints, and not against me in particular. O how careful would a soul be in duty, if as going to church or closet, he had such a serious meditation as this, Now Satan is at my heels to hinder me in my work, if my God help me not!

Secondly, It is a close combat. Armies fight at some distance, wrestlers

Digitized by Google

grapple hand to hand. An arrow shot from afar may be seen and shunned, but when the enemy hath hold of one, there is no declining, but either he must resist manfully, or fall shamefully at his enemy's feet. Satan comes close up, and gets within the Christian, takes his hold of his very flesh and corrupt nature, and by this shakes him.

Secondly, The universality of the combat. We wrestle, which comprehends all, on purpose you may perceive, the apostle changeth the pronoun *ye* in the former verse, into *we* in this, that he may include himself as well as them; as if he had said, the quarrel is with every saint. Satan neither fears to assault the minister, nor despiseth to wrestle with the meanest saint in the congregation; great and small, minister and people, all must wrestle: not one part of Christ's army in the field, and the other at ease in their quarters, where no enemy comes; here are enemies enough to engage all at once.

Thirdly, The permanency or duration of this combat, and that lies in the tense. Not, our wrestling *was* at first conversion, but now over, and we passed the pikes; not, we *shall* wrestle when sickness comes, and death comes, but our wrestling *is;* the enemy is ever in sight of us, yea, in sight with us: and there is an evil of every day's temptation, which, like Paul's bonds, abides us wherever we be come. So that these particulars summed up, will amount to this point:

Section II.—*Doct.* The Christian's life is a continual wrestling. He is, as Jeremy said of himself, born 'a man of strife,' or what the prophet to Asa may be said to every Christian; 'From hence thou shalt have wars,' from thy spiritual birth to thy natural death; from the hour when thou first didst set thy face to heaven, till thou shalt set thy foot in heaven. Israel's march out of Egypt was in gospel-sense our taking the field against sin and Satan; and when had they peace? not till they lodged their colours in Canaan. No condition wherein the Christian is here below is quiet. Is it prosperity or adversity? here is work for both hands, to keep pride and security down in the one, faith and patience up in the other; no place which the Christian can call privileged ground. Lot, in Sodom, wrestled with the wicked inhabitants thereof, his 'righteous soul being vexed with their unclean conversation. And how fares he at Zoar? Do not his own daughters bring a spark of Sodom's fire into his own bed, whereby he is inflamed with lust? Some have thought, if they were but in such a family, under such a ministry, out of such occasions, O then they should never be tempted as now they are: I confess change of air is a great help to weak nature, and these forenamed as vantage-ground against Satan; but thinkest thou to fly from Satan's presence thus? No, though thou shouldst take the wings of the morning, he would fly after thee: these may make him change his method in tempting, but not lay down his design; so long as his old friend is alive within, he will be knocking at the door without. No duty can be performed without wrestling! the Christian needs his sword as much as his trowel. He wrestles with a body of flesh; this to the Christian in duty is as the beast to the traveller; he cannot go his journey without it, and much ado to go with it. If the flesh be kept high and lusty, then it is wanton, and will not obey; if low, then it is weak, and soon tires: thus the Christian rids but little ground, because he must go his weak body's pace. He wrestles with a body of sin as well as of flesh; this mutters and murmurs when the soul is taking up any duty. Sometimes it keeps the Christian from duty, so that he cannot do what he would. As Paul said, 'I would have come once and again, but Satan hindered me.' I would have prayed, may the Christian say, at such a time, and meditated on the word I heard, the mercies I received at another, but this enemy hindered. It is true, indeed, grace sways the sceptre in such a soul, yet as schoolboys taking their time when their master is abroad, do shut him out, and for a while lord it in misrule, though they are whipped for it afterwards; thus the unregenerate part takes advantage when grace is not on its watch, to disturb its government, and shut it out from duty; though this last makes the soul more severe in mortifying, yet it costs some scuffle before it can recover its throne; and when it cannot shut from duty, yet then is the Christian wofully yoked with it in duty; it cannot do what it doth as it would; many a letter in its copy doth this enemy spoil, while he jogs him with impertinent thoughts; when the

Digitized by Google

Christian is praying, then Satan and the flesh are a prating; he cries, and they louder, to put him out, or drown his cry. Thus we see the Christian is asailed on every side by his enemy; and how can it be other, when the seeds of war are laid deep in the natures of both, which can never be rooted up till the devil cease to be a devil, sin to be sin, and the saint to be a saint? Though wolves may snarl at one another, yet soon are quiet again, because the quarrel is not in their nature; but the wolf and the lamb can never be made frends. Sin will lust against grace, and grace draw upon sin whenever they meet.

SECTION III.—*Use* 1. First, This may reprove snch as wrestle; but against whom?—against God, not against sin and Satan. These are bold men, indeed, who dare try a fall with the Almighty; yet such they are, and a woe pronounced against them, Isa. xlv. 9: 'Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker.' It is easy to tell which of these will be worsted. What can he do but break his shins, that dasheth them against a rock? A goodly battle there is like to be, when thorns contest with fire, and stubble with flame. But where live those giants that dare enter the list with the great God? What are their names, that we may know them, and brand them for creatures above all other unworthy to live? Take heed, O thou who askest, that the wretched man whom thou seemest so to defy, be not found in thine own clothes itself! Judas was the traitor, though he would not answer to his name, but put it off with a 'Master, is it I?' and so mayest thou be the fighter against God. The heart is deceitful. Even holy David, for all his anger was so hot against the rich man that took away the poor man's ewe-lamb, that he bound it with an oath, the man shall not live who hath done it, yet proves at last to be himself the man, as the prophet told him, 2 Sam. xii.

Now there are two ways wherein men wrestle against God: First, When they wrestle against his Spirit. Secondly, When they wrestle against his Providence.

First, When they wrestle against his Spirit We read of the Spirit's striving with the creature, Gen. vi. 3: 'My Spirit shall not always strive with man.' Where the striving is not in anger and wrath to destroy them (that God could do without any stir or scuffle), but a loving strife and contest with man. The old world was running with such a career headlong into their ruin, he sends his Spirit to interpose, and by his counsels and reproofs to offer, as it were, to stop and reclaim them. As if one seeing another ready to offer violence on himself, should strive to get the knife out of his hand, with which he would do the mischief: or one that hath a purse of gold in his hand to give, should follow another by all manner of entreaties, striving with him to accept and take it. Such a kind of strife is this of the Spirit's with men. They are the lusts of men, those bloody instruments of death, with which sinners are mischieving themselves, that the Holy Spirit strives by sweet counsels and entreaties, to get out of our hands. They are Christ's, his grace and eternal life, he strives to make us accept at the hands of God's mercy; and for repulsing the Spirit thus striving with them, sinners are justly counted fighters against God: 'Ye stiffnecked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost,' Acts vii. 51. Now there is a twofold striving of the Spirit, and so of our wrestling against it. First, The Spirit strives in his messengers with sinners; they coming on his errand, and not their own, he voucheth the faithful counsels, reproofs, and exhortations, which they give as his own act. 'Noah, that preacher of righteousness,' what he said to the old world, is called, 'the preaching of the Spirit,' 1 Pet. iii. 19. The pains that Moses, Aaron, and other servants of God took in instructing Israel, is called, the instruction of the Spirit, Nehem. ix. 20. So that when the word, which God's ministers bring in his name, is rejected, the faithful counsels they give are thrown at sinners' heels, and made light of, then do they strive with the Spirit, and wrestle against Christ as really, as if he visibly, in his own person, had been in the pulpit, and preached the sermon to them. When God comes to reckon with sinners, it will prove so; then God will rub up your memories, and mind you of his striving with you, and your unkind resisting him. 'They, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, shall know they had a Prophet among them,'

Digitized by Google

Ezek. ii. 5. Now men soon forget whom and what they hear; ask them what was pressed upon their conscience in such a sermon, they have forgot; what were the precious truths laid out in another, and they are lost; and well were it for them, if their memories were no better in another world; it would ease their torments more than a little. But then they shall know they had a Prophet among them, and what a price they had with him in their hands, though it was in fools' keeping. They shall know what he was, and what he said, though a thousand years past, as fresh as if it were done but last night. The more zealous and compassionate, the more painful and powerful he was in his place, the greater shall their sin be found to break from such holy violence offered to do them good. Surely God will have something for the sweat, yea, lives of his servants, which were worn out in striving with such rebellious ones. May be yet, sinners, your firmament is clear, no cloud to be seen that protends a storm; but know, as you used to say, winter does not rot in the clouds, you shall have it at last; every threatening which your faithful ministers have denounced against you out of the word, God is bound to make good. 'He confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers,' Isa. xliv. 26; and that in judgment against sinners, confirming the threatenings as well as in mercy performing the promises, which they declare as the portion of his children. But it will be time enough to ask such on a sick bed, or a dying hour, whether the words of the Lord delivered by their faithful preachers have not taken hold of them. Some have confessed, with horror they have, as the Jews, Zech. i. 6: 'Like as the Lord of hosts thought to do unto us, so hath he dealt with us.' Secondly, the Spirit strives with men more immediately, when he takes his inward approaches to the consciences of men, debating in their own bosoms the case with them; one while he shows them their sins in their bloody colours, and whither they will surely bring them, if not looked to timely, which he doth so convincingly, that the creature smells sometimes the very fire and brimstone about him, and is at present in a temporal hell; another while he falls a parleying and treating with them, making gracious overtures to the sinner, if he will return at his reproof, presents the grace of the gospel, and opens a door of hope for its recovery, yea falls a wooing and beseeching of him to throw down his rebellious arms, and come to Christ for life, whose heart is in a present disposition to receive and embrace the first motion the returning sinner makes for mercy. Now, when the Spirit of God follows the sinner from place to place, and time to time, suggesting such motions, and renewing his old suit, and the creature shall fling out of the Spirit's hands thus striving with him, *re infecta*, as far from renouncing his lusts, or taking any liking to Christ as ever; this is to resist the Spirit to his face, and it carries so much malignity in it, that, even where it hath not been final, poor humbled souls have been overset with the horror of it, that they could not for a long time be persuaded but that it was the unpardonable sin. Take heed, therefore, sinners, how you use the Spirit when he comes knocking at the door of your hearts: open at his knock, and he will be your guest, you shall have his sweet company; repulse him, and you have not a promise he will knock again. And if once he leave striving with thee, unhappy man, thou art lost for ever! thou liest like a ship cast up by the waves upon some high rock, where the tide never comes to fetch it off. Thou mayest come to the word, converse with other ordinances, but in vain. It is the spirit of them which is both tide and wind, to set the soul afloat, and carry it on, or else it is like a ship on dry ground, which stirs not.

Secondly, We wrestle against God when we wrestle with his providence, and that two ways; First, When we are discontented with his providential disposure of us. God's carving for us both not please us so, but that we are objecting against his dealings towards us, at least muttering something with the fool in our hearts, which God hears as lightly as man our words. God counts, then we begin to quarrel with him, when we do not acquiesce in, and say Amen to his providence, whatever it is. He calls it 'a contending with the Almighty,' Job vi. 1, yea, 'a reproving of God.' And he is a bold man sure that dare find fault with God, and article against heaven. God challengeth him, whoever he is that doth this, to answer it at his peril. 'He that reproveth God, let him answer it,' ver. 2 of the chapter fore-mentioned. It was high time for Job to

Digitized by Google

have done, when he hears what a sense God puts upon those unwary words, which dropped from him in the anguish of his spirit, and paroxysm of his sufferings. Contend with the Almighty! Reprove God! Good man, how blank he is, and cries out, 'I am vile: what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.' Let God but pardon what is past, and he shall hear such language no more. O, sirs, take heed of this wrestling above all other. Contention is uncomfortable, with whomsoever it is we fall out; neighbours or friends, wife or husband, children or servants; but worst of all with God. If God cannot please thee, but thy heart riseth against him, what hopes are there of thy pleasing him, who will take nothing kindly from that man who is angry with him? And how can love to God be preserved in a discontented heart, that is always muttering against him? Love cannot think any evil of God, nor endure to hear any speak evil of him, but it must take God's part, as Jonathan David's, when Saul spake basely of him; and, when it cannot be heard, will, like him, arise and be gone. When afflicted, love can allow thee to groan, but not to grumble. If thou wilt ease thy encumbered spirit into God's bosom by prayer, and humbly wrestle with God on thy knees, love is for thee, and will help thee to the best arguments thou canst use to God: but if thou wilt vent thy distempered passions, and shew a mutinous spirit against God, this stabs it to the heart.

Secondly, We wrestle against Providence, when incorrigible under the various dispensations of God towards us. Providence has a voice, if we had an ear; mercies should draw, afflictions drive; now, when neither fair means nor foul do us good, but we are impenitent under both, this is to wrestle against God with both hands. Either of these have their peculiar aggravations. One is against love, and so disingenuous; the other is against the smart of his rod, and therein we slight his anger, and are cruel to ourselves in kicking against the pricks. Mercy should make us ashamed, wrath afraid to sin. He that is not ashamed, has not the spirit of a man. He that is not afraid when smitten, is worse than a beast, who stands in awe of whip and spur. Sometimes mercy, especially those outward mercies which have a pleasing relish to the carnal part in a Christian, hath proved a snare to the best of men; but then affliction useth to recover them: but when affliction makes men worse, and they harden themselves against God, to sin more and more while the rod is on them, what is like to reclaim them? Few are made better by prosperity, whom afflictions make worse. He that will sin, though he goes in pain, will much more if that once be gone. But take heed of thus contesting with God. There is nothing got by scuffling with God, but blows, or worse. If he say he will afflict thee no more, it is even the worst he can say; it is as much as if he should say, he will be in thy debt till another world, and there pay thee altogether. But if he means thee mercy, thou shalt hear from him in some sharper affliction than ever. He hath wedges that can rive thee, wert thou a more knotty piece than thou art. 'Art there yet the treasures of wickedness, and the scant measure that is abominable?' saith God to Israel, Micah vi. 9. What, incorrigible, though 'the Lord's voice crieth unto the city,' bidding you 'hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it!' See what course God resolves on, ver. 13: 'Therefore I will make thee sick in smiting of thee.' As if he had said, My other physic I see was too weak, it did not work to turn your stomach, but I will prepare a potion that shall make you sick at heart.

Use 2. It reproves those who seem to wrestle against sin, but not according to the word of command that Christ gives. There is a law in wrestling which must be observed, 2 Tim. ii. 5: 'If a man also strive for masteries, yet he is not crowned except he strive lawfully.' He alludes to the Roman games, to which there were judges appointed to see that no foul play were offered contrary to the law for wrestling; the prize being denied to such, though they did foil their adversary; which the apostle improves to make the Christian careful in his war as being under a stricter law and discipline, that requires not only valour to fight, but obedience to fight, by order, and according to the word of command: now few do this that go for great wrestlers.

First, Some, while they wrestle against one sin, embrace another; and in this case, it is not the person wrestles against sin, but one sin wrestles with another;

Digitized by Google

and it is no wonder to see thieves fall out when they come to divide the spoil: lusts are divers, Tit. iv. 3, and it is hard to please many masters, especially when their commands are so contrary; when pride bids lay on in bravery, lavish out in entertainment, covetousness bids lay up; when malice bids revenge, carnal policy saith, Conceal thy wrath, though not forgive; when lust sends to his sink of sin, hypocrisy pulls him back for shame of the world. Now is he God's champion that resists one sin at the command of another, it may be a worse?

Secondly, Some wrestle, but they are pressed into the field, not volunteers; their slavish fear scares them at present from their lust; so that the combat is rather betwixt their conscience and will, than them and their lust. Give me such a sin, saith will; no, saith conscience, it will scald, and throws it away. A man may love the wine, though he is loath to have his lips burned; 'hypocrites themselves are afraid to burn.' In such combats the will at last prevails, either by bribing the understanding to present the lust it desires in a more pleasing dress, that conscience may not be scared with such hideous apparitions of wrath, or by pacifying conscience with some promise of repentance for the future, or by forbearing some sin for the present, which it can best spare, thereby to gain the reputation of something like a reformation; or if all this will not do, then, prompted by the fury of its lust, the will proclaims open war against conscience, sinning in the face of it, like some wild horse, impatient of the spur which pricks him, and bridle that curbs him, gets the bit between his teeth, and runs with full speed, till at last he easeth himself of his rider; and then, where he sees fattest pasture, no hedge or ditch can withhold him, till in the end you find him starving in some pound for his trespass: thus many sin at such rate, that conscience can no longer hold the reins, nor sit the saddle, but is thrown down and laid for dead; and then the wretches range where their lusts can have the fullest meal, till at last they pay for their stolen pleasures most dearly, when conscience comes to itself, pursues them, and takes them more surely by the throat than ever, never to let them go till it brings them before God's tribunal.

Thirdly, Others wrestle with sin, but they do not hate it, and therefore they are favourable to it, and seek not the life of sin as their deadly enemy: these wrestle in jest, and not in earnest; the wounds they give sin one day, are healed by the next. Let men resolve never so strongly against sin, yet it will creep again into their favour, till the love of sin be quenched in the heart; and this fire will never die of itself, the love of Christ must quench the love of sin, as Jerome excellently, *Unus amor, extinguit alium.* This heavenly fire will indeed put out that flame of hell, which he illustrates by Ahasuerus's carriage to Vashti, his queen, who in the first chapter makes a decree in all haste, that she come no more before him: but when his passion is a little down, chap. ii. 1, he begins to relent towards her, which his council perceiving, presently seek out for a beautiful virgin, on whom the king might place his love, and take into his royal bed; which done, we hear no more of Vashti: then, and not till then, will the soul's decree stand against sin, when the soul hath taken Christ into his bosom.

SECTION IV.—Secondly, To the saints; seeing your life is a continual wrestling here on earth, it is your wisdom to study how you may best manage the combat with your worst enemy; which, that you may do, take these few directions.

First, Look thou goest not into the field without thy second; my meaning is, engage God by prayer to stand at thy back; God is in a league offensive and defensive with thee; but he looks to be called. Did the Ephraimites take it ill, that Gideon called not them into the field; and may not God much more? As if thou meanest to steal a victory before he should know it. Thou hast more valour than Moses, who would not stir without God; no, though he sent an angel for his lieutenant. Thou art wiser than Jacob, who, to overcome Esau, now marching up, turns from him, and falls upon God: he knew if he could wrestle with God, he might trust God to deal with his brother. Engage God, and the back-door is shut, no enemy can come behind thee; yea, thine enemy shall fall before thee. 'God turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,' saith David; Heaven saith Amen to his prayer, and the wretch 'hangs himself.'

Secondly, Be very careful of giving thine enemy hand-hold. Wrestlers strive

Digitized by Google

to fasten upon some part or other which gives them advantage more easily to throw their adversary; to prevent which they used, first, to lay aside their garments; secondly, to anoint their bodies. For the first, Christian, labour to put off the old man, which is most personal; that corruption which David calls his own iniquity, Psalm xviii. 23. This is the skirt which Satan lays hold of; observe what it is, and mortify it daily; then Satan will retreat with shame, when he sees the head of that enemy upon the wall, which should have betrayed thee into his hands.

Secondly, The Roman wrestlers used to anoint their bodies; so do thou: bathe thy soul with the frequent meditation of Christ's love. Satan will find little welcome where Christ's love dwells; love will kindle love; and that will be as a wall of fire to keep off Satan; it will make thee disdain the offer of a sin, and, as oil, supple thy joints, and make agile to offend thy enemy. Think how Christ wrestled in thy quarrel: sin, hell, and wrath, had all come full mouth upon thee, had not he coped with them in the way. And canst thou find in thy heart to requite his love by betraying his glory into the hands of sin by cowardice or treachery? Say not thou lovest him, so long as thou canst lay those sins in thy bosom which plucked his heart out of his bosom. It were strange if a child should keep, and delight to use, no other knife but that wherewith his father was stabbed.

Thirdly, Improve the advantage thou gettest at any time wisely. Sometimes the Christian hath his enemy on the hip, yea, on the ground; can set his foot on the very neck of his pride, and throw away his unbelief, as a thing absurd and unreasonable; now, as a wise wrestler, fall with all thy weight upon thine enemy; though a man think it foul play to strike when his adversary is down, yet do not thou so compliment with sin as to let it breathe or rise. Take heed thou art not charged of God, as once Ahab, for letting go this enemy now in thy hands, whom God has appointed to destruction. Learn a little wisdom of the serpent's brood, who, when they had Christ under their foot, never thought they had been sure enough; no, not when dead; and therefore both seal and watch his grave. Thus do thou to hinder the resurrection of thy sin; seal it down with stronger purposes, solemn covenants, and watch it by a wakeful, circumspect walking.

Use 3. This is ground of consolation to the weak Christian, who disputes against the truth of his grace, from the inward conflicts and fightings he hath with his lusts; and is ready to say, like Gideon, in regard of outward enemies, 'If God be with me, why is all this befallen me?' Why do I find such strugglings in me, provoking me to sin, pulling me back from that which is good? Why dost ask? The answer is soon given; because thou art a wrestler, not a conqueror. Thou mistakest the state of a Christian in this life; when one is made a Christian, he is not presently called to triumph over his slain enemies, but carried into the field to meet and fight them. The state of grace is the commencing of a war against sin, not the ending of it; rather than thou shalt not have an enemy to wrestle with, God himself will come in a disguise into the field, and appear to be thine enemy. Thus, when Jacob was alone, a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day; and therefore set thy heart at rest if this be thy scruple. Thy soul may rather take comfort in this, that thou art a wrestler; this struggling within thee, if upon the right ground, and to the right end, doth evidence there are two nations within thee, two contrary natures; the one from earth, earthly; and the other from heaven, heavenly; yea, for thy further comfort know, though thy corrupt nature be the elder, yet it shall serve the younger.

Use 4. O how should this make thee, Christian, long to be gone home, where there is none of this stir and scuffle! It is strange, that every hour seems not a day, and every day a year, till death sounds thy joyful retreat, and calls thee off the field, where the bullets fly so thick, and thou art fighting for thyself with thy deadly enemies, to come to court, where not swords, but palms are seen in the saints' hands; not drums, but harps; not groans of bleeding soldiers and wounded consciences, but sweet and ravishing music is heard of triumphing victors, caroling the praises of God and the Lamb, through whom they have overcome. Well, Christians, while you are below, comfort yourselves

Digitized by Google

with these things. There is a place of rest remains for the people of God. You do not beat the air, but wrestle for a heaven that is yonder above these clouds; you have your worst first; the best will follow. You wrestle but to win a crown, and win to wear it, yea, wear, never to lose it; which, once on, none shall take off, or put you to the hazard of a battle more. Here, we overcome to fight again; the battle of one temptation may be over, but the war remains. What peace can we have, as long as devils can come abroad out of their holes, or any thing of sinful nature remains in ourselves unmortified, which will even fight upon its knees, and strike with one arm while the other is cut off? But when death comes, the last stroke is struck; this good physician will perfectly cure thee of thy spiritual blindness and lameness, as the martyr told his fellow at the stake, bloody Bonner would do their bodies. What is it, Christian, which takes away the joy of thy life, but the wrestlings and combats which this bosom enemy puts thee to? Is not this the Peninnah, that vexing and disturbing thy spirit, hath kept thee off many a sweet meal thou mightest have had in communion with God and his saints? Or, if thou hast come, hath made thee cover the altar of God with thy tears and groans? And will it not be a happy hand that cuts the knot, and sets thee loose from thy deadness, hypocrisy, pride, and what not, wherewith thou wert yoked? It is life which is thy loss, and death which is thy gain. Be but willing to endure the rending of the veil of thy flesh, and thou art where thou wouldst be, out of the reach of sin, at rest in the bosom of thy God. And why should a short evil of pain affright thee more, than the deliverance from a continual torment of sin's evil ravish thee? Some you know have chosen to be cut, rather than to be ground daily with the stone, and yet, may be, their pain comes again; and canst thou not quietly think of dying, to be delivered from the torment of thy sins, never to return more? And yet that is not half that death doth for thee. Peace is sweet after war, ease after pain; but what tongue can express what joy, what glory must fill the creature at the first sight of God, and that blessed company? None but one that dwells there can tell. Did we know more of that blissful state, we ministers would find it as hard a work to persuade Christians to be willing to live here so long, as now it is to persuade them to be willing to die so soon.

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN IS SHEWED WHAT IS MEANT BY FLESH AND BLOOD; HOW THE CHRISTIAN DOTH NOT, AND HOW HE DOTH WRESTLE AGAINST THE SAME.

SECTION I.—Now follows the description of the saint's enemies, with whom he is to wrestle.

First, Described negatively, 'Not with flesh and blood.'

Secondly, Positively, 'But against principalities and powers,' &c.

First, For the negative part of the description; we are not to take it for a pure negation, as if we had no conflict with flesh and blood, but wholly and solely to engage against Satan; but by way of comparison, not only with flesh and blood, and in some sense not chiefly. It is usual in Scripture, such manner of phrases; Luke xiv. 12, 'Call not thy friends to dinner, but the poor;' that is, not only those, so as to neglect the poor. Now, what is meant here by flesh and blood? There is a double interpretation of the words.

First, By flesh and blood may be meant our bosom corruptions; that sin which is in our corrupt nature so oft called flesh in the Scripture; 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit; and sometimes flesh and blood; as Matt. xvi. 17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed this;' that is, this confession thou hast made comes from above; thy fleshly corrupt mind could never have found out this supernatural truth; thy sinful will would never have embraced it. So 1 Cor. xv. 20: 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God;' that is, sinful mortal flesh, as it is expounded in the words following. So, Gal. i. 11: 'Consulted not with flesh and blood;' that is, carnal reason. Now this bosom enemy may be called flesh, partly from its derivation, and partly from its operation; from its derivation, because it is derived and propagated to us by natural generation; thus Adam is said to beget 'a son in his own likeness,' sinful as he was, as well as mortal and miserable; yea, the

Digitized by Google

holiest saint on earth having flesh in him, derives this corrupt and sinful nature to his child; as the circumcised Jew begat an uncircumcised child; and the wheat cleansed and fanned, being sown, comes up with a husk: John iii. 6, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh.'

Secondly, It is called flesh from the operations of this corrupt nature, which are fleshly and carnal. The reasonings of the corrupt mind, fleshly, therefore called the carnal mind, incapable indeed of the things of God, which it neither doth nor can perceive; as the sun doth *obsignare superiora dum revelet inferiora*, hide the heavens which are above it from us, while it reveals things beneath; so carnal reason leaves the creature in the dark concerning spiritual truths, when it is most able to conceive and discourse of creature excellencies and carnal interests here below. What a childish question, for so wise a man, did Nicodemus put to Christ! though Christ, to help him, did wrap his speech in a carnal phrase. If fleshly reason cannot understand spiritual truths when thus accommodated, and the notions of the gospel translated into its own language, what skill is it like to have of them, if put to read them in their original tongue: I mean, if this garment of carnal expression were taken off, and spiritual truths in their naked hue presented to its view? The motions of the natural will are carnal, and therefore, Rom. viii. 5, 'they that are after the flesh' are said to 'mind the things of the flesh.' All its desires, delights, cares, fears, are in and of carnal things; it savours spiritual food no more than an angel fleshly. *Omnis vita gustu ducitur:* what we cannot relish we will hardly make our daily food. Every creature hath its proper diet; the lion eats not grass, nor the horse flesh; what is food to the carnal heart, is poison to the gracious; and that which is pleasing to the gracious, is distasteful to the carnal. Now according to this interpretation, the sense of the apostle is not as if the Christian had no combat with his corrupt nature, (for in another place it is said, 'The spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit;' and this enemy is called the sin that besets the Christian round;) but to aggravate his conflict with this enemy by the access of a foreign power, Satan, who strikes in with this domestic enemy. As if, while a king is fighting with his own mutinous subjects, some outlandish troops should join with them, now he may be said not to fight with his subjects, but with a foreign power. The Christian wrestles not with his naked corruptions, but with Satan in them: were there no devil, yet we should have our hands full in resisting the corruptions of our own hearts; but the access of this enemy makes the battle more terrible, because he heads them, who is a captain so skilful and experienced. Our sin is the engine, Satan is the engineer; lust the bait, Satan the angler: when a soul is enticed by his own lusts, he is said to be tempted, James i. 14; because both Satan, and our own lusts, concur to the completing the sin.

Use 1. First, Let this make thee, Christian, ply the work of mortification close; it is no policy to let thy lusts have arms, who are sure to rise and declare against thee when thine enemy comes. Achish's nobles did but wisely, in that they would not trust David in their army when to fight against Israel, lest in the battle he should be an adversary to them. And darest thou go to duty, or engage in any action, where Satan will appear against thee, and not endeavour to make sure of thy pride, unbelief, &c., that they join not with thine enemy?

Secondly, Are Satan and thine own flesh against thee, not single corruption, but edged with his policy, and backed by his power? See then what need thou hast of more help than thy own grace; take heed of grappling with him in the strength of thy naked grace; here thou hast two to one against thee. Satan was too hard for Adam, though he went so well appointed into the field, because left to himself; much more easily will he foil thee; cling, therefore, about thy God for strength, get him with thee, and then, though a worm, thou shalt be able to deal with this serpent.

Section II.—Secondly, Flesh and blood is interpreted as a periphrasis of man. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, that is, not with man, who is here described by that part which chiefly distinguisheth him from the angelical nature: 'Touch me,' saith Christ, 'and handle me; a spirit hath not flesh.' Now according to this interpretation observe;

First, How meanly the Spirit of God speaks of man.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Where he lays the stress of the saints' battle, not in resisting flesh and blood, but principalities and powers; where the apostle excludes not our combat with man, for the war is against the serpent and his seed. As wide as the world is, it cannot peaceably hold the saints and wicked together; but his intent is to shew what a complicated enemy (man's wrath and Satan's interwoven together) we have to deal with.

First, For the first, How meanly doth the Spirit of God speak of man, calling him flesh and blood! Man hath a heaven-born soul, which makes him akin to angels, yea, to the God of them, who is the Father of spirits; but this is passed by in silence, as if God would not own that which is tainted with sin, and not the creature God at first made it; or because the soul, though of such noble extraction, yet being so immersed in sensuality, deserves no other name than flesh, which part of man levels him with the beast, and is here intended to express the weakness and frailty of man's nature. It is the phrase which the Holy Ghost expresseth the weakness and impotency of a creature by; Isa. xxxi. 3: 'They are men, and their horses are flesh,' that is, weak; as on the contrary, when he would set out the power and strength of a thing, he opposeth it to flesh, 2 Cor. x. 3: 'Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty;' and so in the text, not flesh and blood, but powers. As if he should say, Had you no other to fear but a weak sorry man, it were not worth the providing arms or ammunition; but you have enemies that neither are flesh, nor are resisted with flesh. So that here we see what a weak creature man is, not only weaker than angels, as they are spirits, and he flesh, but in some sense beneath the beasts, as the flesh of man is frailer than the flesh of beasts; therefore the Spirit of God compares man to the 'grass,' which soon 'withers,' Isa. xl. 6; and his 'goodliness to the flower of the field.' Yea, he is called vanity, Ps. lxii. 9: 'Men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie,' both alike vain; only the rich and the great man, his vanity is covered with honour, wealth, &c., which are here called a lie, because they are not what they seem, and so worse than plain vanity, which is known to be so, and deceives not.

Use 1. Is man but frail flesh? Let this humble thee, O man, in all thy excellency; flesh is but one remove from filth and corruption; thy soul is the salt that keeps thee sweet, or else thou wouldst stink above ground. Is it thy beauty thou prides't in? Flesh is grass, but beauty is the vanity of this vanity. This goodliness is like the flower, which lasts not so long as the grass, appears in its month, and is gone; yea, like the beauty of the flower, which fades while the flower stands. How soon will time's plough make furrows in thy face; yea, one fit of an ague so change thy countenance, as shall make thy doating lovers afraid to look on thee? Is it strength? Alas, it is an arm of flesh, which withers often in the stretching forth; ere long thy blood, which is now warm, will freeze in thy veins; thy spring crowned with May buds, will tread on December's heel; thy marrow dry in thy bones, thy sinews shrink, thy legs bow under the weight of thy body, thy eye-strings crack, thy tongue not able to call for help; yea, thy heart with thy flesh shall fail; and now thou, who art such a giant, take a turn if thou canst in thy chamber, yea, raise but thy head from thy pillow, if thou art able, or call back thy breath, which is making haste to be gone out of thy nostrils, never to return more; and darest thou glory in that which so soon may be prostrate?

Is it wisdom? The same grave that covers thy body shall bury all that (the wisdom of thy flesh I mean); all thy thoughts shall perish, and goodly plots come to nothing. Indeed, if a Christian, thy thoughts as such shall ascend with thee, not one holy breathing of thy soul lost. Is it thy blood and birth? Whoever thou art, thou art base-born till born again; the same blood runs in thy veins with the beggar in the street, Acts xvii. 26. All nations there we find made of the same blood: in two things all are alike; we come in and go out of the world alike; as one is not made of finer earth, so not resolved into purer dust.

Use 2. Secondly, Is man flesh? Trust not in man; 'cursed be he that makes flesh his arm.' Not the mighty man; robes may hide and garnish, they cannot change flesh: Ps. cxlvi., 'Put not your trust in princes;' alas! they cannot keep their crowns on their own heads, their heads on their own

Digitized by Google

shoulders, and lookest thou for that which they cannot give themselves? Not in wise men, whose designs recoil oft upon themselves, that they cannot perform their enterprise. *Amphora cæpit institui currente rota cur urceus exit.* Man's carnal wisdom intends one thing, but God turns the wheel, and brings forth another. Trust not in holy men; they have flesh, and so their judgment not infallible, yea their way sometimes doubtful. His mistake may lead thee aside, and though he returns, thou mayest go on and perish. Trust not in any man, in all men, no not in thyself, thou art flesh. 'He is a fool,' saith the wise man, 'that trusts his heart.' Not in the best thou art or doest; the garment of thy righteousness is spotted with the flesh; all is counted by St. Paul, 'confidence in the flesh,' besides our rejoicing in Christ, Phil. iii. 3.

Use 3. Thirdly, Fear not man, he is but flesh. This was David's resolve, Ps. lvi. 4: 'I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.' Thou needest not, thou oughtest not to fear. Thou needest not. What, not such a great man; not such a number of men, who have the keys of all the prisons at their girdle; who can kill or save alive? No, not these; only look they be thy enemies for righteousness' sake. Take heed thou makest not the least child thine enemy, by offering wrong to him; God will right the wicked even upon the saint. If he offends, he shall find no shelter under God's wing for his sin. This made Jerome complain, that the Christian's sin made the arms of those barbarous nations which invaded Christendom victorious: *Nostris peccatis fortes sunt barbari.* But if man's wrath find thee in God's way, and his fury take fire at thy holiness, thou needest not fear though thy life be the prey he hunts for. Flesh can only wound flesh; he may kill thee, but not hurt thee. Why shouldst thou fear to be stripped of that which thou hast resigned already to Christ? It is the first lesson thou learnest, if a Christian, to deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow thy Master; so that the enemy comes too late; thou hast no life to lose, because thou hast given it already to Christ; nor can man take away that without God's leave; all thou hast is insured; and though God hath not promised thee immunity from suffering in this kind, yet he hath undertaken to bear the loss, yea, to pay thee a hundredfold, and thou shalt not stay for it till another world. Again, thou oughtest not to fear flesh. Our Saviour, Matt. x., thrice in the compass of six verses, commands us not to fear man; if thy heart quail at him, how wilt thou behave thyself in the list against Satan, whose little finger is heavier than man's loins. The Romans had *arma prælusoria*, weapons rebated, or cudgels, which they were tried at before they came to the sharp. If thou canst not bear a bruise in thy flesh from man's cudgels and blunt weapons, what wilt thou do when thou shalt have Satan's sword in thy side? God counts himself reproached when his children fear a sorry man; therefore, we are bid sanctify the Lord, not to fear their fear. Now, if thou wouldst not fear man, who is but flesh, labour,

First, to mortify thy own flesh; flesh only fears flesh: when the soul degenerates into carnal desires and delights, no wonder he falls into carnal fears. Have a care, Christian, thou bringest not thyself into bondage; perhaps thy heart feeds on the applause of man; this will make thee afraid to be evil spoken of, as those who shuffled with Christ, John xii. 42, owning him in private, when they durst not confess him openly, for they loved the praise of men. David saith, 'The mouth of the wicked is an open sepulchre;' and in this grave hath many a saint's name been buried. But if this fleshly desire were mortified, thou wouldst not pass to be judged by man, and so of all carnal affections. Some meat you observe is anguish: if thou settest thy heart on any thing that is carnal, wife, child, estate, &c., these will incline thee to a base fear of man, who may be God's messenger to afflict thee in these.

Secondly, Set faith against flesh: faith fixeth the heart, and a fixed heart is not readily afraid. Physicians tell us, we are never so subject to receive infection as when the spirits are low, and therefore the antidotes they give are all cordials. When the spirit is low through unbelief, every threatening from man makes a sad impression. Let thy faith but take a deep draught of the promises, and thy courage will rise.

Fourthly, Comfort thyself, Christian, with this, that thou art flesh, so thy heavenly Father knows it, and considers thee for it.

Digitized by Google

First, In point of affliction. Ps. ciii. 14, "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust.' Not like some unskilled empiric, who hath but one receipt for all, strong or weak, young or old; but as a wise physician considers his patient, and then writes his bill: men and devils are but God's apothecaries; they make not our physic, but give what God prescribes. Balaam loved Balak's fee well enough, but could not go a hair's breadth beyond God's commission. Indeed, God is not so choice with the wicked, Isa. xxvii. 7: "Hath he smitten him as he smote those that smote him?' In a saint's cup the poison of the affliction is corrected, not so in the wicked's; and therefore what is medicine to the one is ruin to the other.

Secondly, In duty; he knows you are but flesh, and therefore pities and accepts thy weak service, yea, he makes apologies for thee; 'The spirit is willing,' saith Christ, 'but the flesh is weak.'

Thirdly, In temptations he considers thou art flesh, and proportions the temptation to so weak a nature: such a temptation as is common to man, a moderate temptation, as in the margin, fitted for so frail a creature. Whenever the Christian begins to faint under the weight of it, God makes as much haste to his succour, as a tender mother would to her swooning child; therefore he is said to be nigh to revive such, lest their spirits should fail.

SECTION III.—The second thing follows: the conjuncture of the saint's enemies: we have not to do with naked man, but with man led on by Satan; not with flesh and blood, but principalities and powers acting in them. There are two sorts of men the Christian wrestles with, good men and bad; Satan strikes in with both.

First, The Christian wrestles with good men. Many a sharp conflict there hath been between saint and saint, scuffling in the dark through misunderstanding of the truth and each other. Abraham and Lot, at strife. Aaron and Miriam jostled with Moses for the wall, till God interposed and ended the quarrel by his immediate stroke on Miriam. The apostles, even in the presence of their Master, were at high words, contesting who should be greatest. Now in these civil wars among saints, Satan is the great kindle-coal, though little seen, because, like Ahab, he fights in a disguise, playing first on one side, and then on the other, aggravating every petty injury, and thereupon provoking to wrath and revenge; therefore the apostle, dehorting from anger, useth this argument; 'Give no place to the devil;' as if he had said, fall not out among yourselves, except you long for the devil's company, who is the true soldier of fortune, as the common phrase is, living by his sword, and therefore hastes thither where there is any hopes of war. Gregory compares the saints in their sad differences to two cocks, which Satan, the master of the pit, sets on fighting, in hope, when killed, to sup with them at night. Solomon saith, Prov. xviii. 6, 'The mouth of the contentious man calls for strokes.' Indeed, we by our mutual strifes give the devil a staff to beat us with; he cannot well work without fire, and therefore blows up these coals of contention, which he useth as his forge, to heat our spirits into wrath, and then we are malleable, easily hammered as he pleaseth. Contention puts the soul into disorder, and *inter arma silent leges*. The law of grace acts not freely, when the spirit is in a commotion; meek Moses, provoked, speaks unadvisedly. Methinks this, if nothing else will, should sound a retreat to our unhappy differences, that this Joab hath a hand in them; he sets this evil spirit between brethren; and what folly is it to bite and devour one another, to make hell sport! We are prone to mistake our heat for zeal, whereas commonly in strife between saints it is a fireship sent in by Satan to break their unity and order; wherein while they stand they are an armada invincible: and Satan knows he hath no other way but this to shatter them: when the Christian's language, which should be one, begins to be confounded, they are then near scattering; it is time for God to part his children, when they cannot live in peace together.

Secondly, The Christian wrestles with wicked men. 'Because you are not of the world,' saith Christ, 'the world hates you.' The saints' nature and life are antipodes to the world; fire and water, heaven and hell, may as soon be reconciled, as they with it. The heretic is his enemy for truth's sake, the profane for holiness; to both the Christian is an abomination, as the Israelite to

Digitized by Google

the Egyptian: hence comes wars; the fire of persecution never goes out in the hearts of the wicked, who say in their hearts as they once with their lips, *Christiani ad leones.* Now in all the saints' wars with the wicked, Satan is commander in chief; it is their father's works they do, his lusts they fulfil. The Sabeans plundered Job, but went on Satan's errand. The heretic broacheth corrupt doctrine, perverts the faith of many, but in that he is the minister of Satan, 2 Cor. xi. 15. They have their call, their wiles, and wages from him. The work of persecutors is ascribed to hell. Is it a persecution of the tongue? it is hell sets on fire. Is it of the hand? still they are but the devil's instruments, Rev. ii. 10: 'The devil shall cast some of you into prison.'

Use 1. First, Do you see any driving furiously against the truths or servants of Christ; O pity them as the most miserable wretches in the world; fear not their power, admire not their parts; they are men possessed of and acted by the devil, they are his drudges and slaughter-slaves, as a martyr called them. Augustine, in his epistle to Lycinius, one of excellent parts, but wicked, who once was his scholar, speaks thus pathetically to him: O how I could weep and mourn over thee, to see such a sparkling wit prostituted to the devil's service! if thou hadst found a golden chalice, thou wouldst have given it to the church; but God hath given thee a golden head, parts and wit, and in this, *propinas teipsum diabolo,* thou drinkest thyself to the devil. When you see men of power or parts using them against God that gave them, weep over them; better they had lived and died, the one slaves, the other fools, than do the devil such service with them.

Use 2. Secondly, O ye saints, when reproached and persecuted, look further than man; spend not your wrath upon him; alas, they are but instruments in the devil's hand: save your displeasure for Satan, who is thy chief enemy: these may be won to Christ's side, and so become they friends at last. Now and then we see some running away from the devil's colours, and washing the wound with their tears, which they have made by their cruelty. It is a notable passage in Anselm, who compares the heretic and persecutor to the horse, and the devil to the rider. Now saith he, in battle, when the enemy comes riding up, the valiant soldier, *Non irascitur equo, sed equiti, et quantum potest agit ut equitem percutiat, equum possideat; sic contra malos homines agendum, non contra illos, sed illum qui illos instigat, ut dum diabolous vincitur, infælices quos ille possidet liberentur:* he is angry not with the horse, but horseman; he labours to kill the man, that he may possess the horse for his use: thus we do with the wicked; we are not to bend our wrath against them, but Satan that rides them, and spurs them on; labouring by prayer for them as Christ did on the cross to dismount the devil, that so these miserable souls, hackneyed by him, may be delivered from him. It is more honour to take one soul alive out of the devil's clutches, than to leave many slain upon the field. Erasmus saith of Augustine, that he begged the lives of those heretics at the hands of the emperor's officers, who had been bloody persecutors of the orthodox: *Cupiebat,* saith he, *amicus mendicus superesse, quos arte sua sanaret:* like a kind physician he desired their life, that if possible he might work a cure on them, and make them sound in the faith.

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN WHAT A PRINCIPALITY SATAN HATH, HOW HE CAME TO BE SUCH A PRINCE, AND HOW WE MAY KNOW WHETHER WE BE UNDER HIM AS A PRINCE OR NOT.

But against principalities and powers, &c.

SECTION I.—The apostle having shewn what the saints' enemies are not, 'flesh and blood,' frail men, who cannot come but they are seen; who may be resisted with man's power, or escape by flight: now he describes them positively, 'against principalities and powers,' &c. Some think the apostle, by these divers name and titles, intends to set forth the distinct orders, whereby the devils are subordinate one to another; so they make the devil, ver. 11, to be

Digitized by Google

the head or monarch, and these, ver. 12, so many inferior orders, as among men there are princes, dukes, earls, &c., under an emperor. That there is an order among the devils, cannot be denied. The Scripture speaks of a 'prince of devils,' Matt. ix., and of the 'devil and his angels,' who with him fell from their first station, called his angels, as it is probably conceived, because one above the rest, as the head of the faction, drew with him multitudes of others into his party, who with him sinned and fell. But that there should be so many distinct orders among them, as there are several branches in this description, is not probable; too weak a notion to be the foundation of a pulpit discourse, therefore we shall take them, as meant of the devils collectively. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but devils, who are principalities, powers, &c., and not distributively, to make principalities one rank, powers another; for some of these branches cannot be meant of distinct orders, but promiscuously of all as spiritual wickedness; it being not proper to one to be spirits or wicked, but common to all.

First, Then, the devil, or whole pack of them, are here described by their government in this world, 'Principalities.'

Secondly, By their strength and puissance, called 'Powers.'

Thirdly, By their nature, in their substance, and degeneracy, 'Spiritual wickedness.'

Fourthly, In their kingdom or proper territories, 'Rulers of the darkness of this world.'

Fifthly, By the ground of the war, 'In heavenly places, or about heavenly things.'

First, Of the first, 'Principalities;' the abstract for the concrete, that is, such as have a principality; so Titus iii. 1, we are bid to be 'subject to principalities and powers,' that is, princes and rulers, so the Vulgate reads it. We wrestle against princes; which some will have to express the eminency of their nature, above man's, that as the state and spirit of princes is more raised than others, great men have great spirits; as Zeba and Zalmunna to Gideon, asking who they were they slew at Tabor; 'As thou art,' say they, 'so were they, each one resembled the children of a king,' that is, for majesty and presence beseeming a princely race. So they think the eminent nature of angels here to be intended, who are so far above the highest prince, as he above the basest peasant; but because they are described by their nature in the fourth branch, I shall subscribe to their judgment who take this for the principality of government which the devil exerciseth in this lower world; and the note shall be,

Doct. That Satan is a great prince; Christ himself styles him 'the prince of the world,' John xiv. Princes have their thrones where they sit in state; Satan hath his, Rev. ii. 13, 'Thou dwellest where Satan hath his throne;' and that such a one as no earthly prince may compare: few kings are enthroned in the hearts of their subjects; they rule their bodies, and command their purses, but how often in a day are they pulled out of their thrones by the wishes of their discontented subjects! But Satan hath the hearts of all his subjects. Princes have their homage and peculiar honour done to them; Satan is served upon the knee of his subjects; the wicked is said to 'worship the devil,' Rev. xiii. 4. No prince expects such worship as he; no less than religious worship will serve him, 2 Chron. xi. 15. Jeroboam there is said to ordain priests for devils, and therefore he is called not only the prince, but the god of this world, because he hath the worship of a god given him. Princes, such as are absolute, have a legislate power, nay, their own will is their law, as at this day in Turkey, where their laws are writ in no other tables than in the proud sultan's breast; thus Satan gives law to the poor sinner, who is bound, and must obey, though the law be writ with his own blood, and the creature hath nothing but damnation for fulfilling the devil's lusts; it is called 'a law of sin,' Rom. viii. 2; because it comes with authority. Princes have their ministers of state, whom they employ for the safety and enlargement of their territories: so Satan his, 2 Cor. xi. 15, who propagate his cursed designs; therefore we read of 'doctrine of devils.' Princes have their *arcana imperii*, which none know but a few favourites in whom they confide; thus the devil hath his mysteries of iniquity,

Digitized by Google

and depths of Satan we read of, which all his subjects know not of, Rev. ii. 24. These are imparted to a few favourites, such as Elymas, whom Paul calls 'full of all subtilty, and child of the devil;' such, whose consciences are so debauched, that they scruple not the most horrid sins; these are his white boys. I have read of a people in America that love meat best when it is rotten and stinks. The devil is of their diet; the more corrupt and rotten the creature is in sin, the better he pleaseth his tooth; some are more the children of the devil than others. Christ had his beloved disciple, and Satan those that lie in his very bosom, and know what is in his heart. In a word, princes have their *vectigalia*, their tribute and custom; so Satan his. Indeed he doth not so much share with the sinner in all, but is owner of all he hath, so that the devil is the merchant, and the sinner but the broker to trade for him, who at last puts all his gains into the devil's purse: time, strength, parts, yea, conscience and all are spent to keep him in his throne.

Section II.—*Quest.* But how comes Satan to his principality?

Ans. Not lawfully, though he can shew a fair claim. As,

First, He obtained it by conquest; as he won his crown, so he wears it by power and policy. But conquest is a cracked title. A thief is not the honester because able to force the traveller to deliver his purse; and a thief on the throne is no better than a private one on the road, or a pirate in a pinnace, as he boldly told Alexander. Neither doth that prove good with process of time which was evil at first. Satan indeed hath kept possession long, but a thief will be so as long as he keeps his stolen goods; he stole the heart of Adam from God at first, and doth no better to this day. Christ's conquest is good, because the ground of the war is righteous, to recover what was his own; but Satan cannot say of the meanest creature, 'It is my own.'

Secondly, Satan may lay claim to his principality by election; it is true, he came in by a wile, but now he is a prince elect, by the unanimous choice of corrupt nature; 'Ye are of your father the devil,' saith Christ, 'and his lusts ye will do.' But this also hath a flaw in it; for man by law of creation is God's subject, and cannot give away God's right; by sin he loseth his right in God, as a protector, but God loseth not his right as a sovereign. Sin disabled man to keep God's law, but it doth not enfranchise or discharge him that he need not keep it.

Thirdly, Satan may claim a deed of gift from God himself, as he was bold to do to Christ himself, upon this ground, persuading him to worship him as the prince of the world, Luke iv. 5, 6: 'He shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world, saying, All this will I give thee, for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will give it:' where there was a truth, though he spake more than the truth, as he cannot speak truth, but to gain credit to some lie at the end of it; God indeed hath delivered in a sense this world to him, but not in his sense, to do what he will with it, nor by any approbatory act given him a patent to vouch him his viceroy; not Satan by the 'grace' of God, but by the 'permission' of God, prince of the world.

Quest. But why doth God permit this apostate creature to exercise such a principality over the world?

Ans. First, As a righteous act of vengeance on man, for revolting from the sweet government of his rightful Lord and Maker; it is the way that God punisheth rebellion: 'Because ye would not serve me with gladness, in the abundance of all things, therefore ye shall serve your enemies in hunger,' &c. Satan is a king given in God's wrath. Ham's curse is man's punishment, 'a servant of servants.' The devil is God's slave, man the devil's. Sin hath set the devil on the creature's back, and now he hurries him without mercy, as he did the swine, till he be choked with flames, if mercy interpose not.

Secondly, God permits this his principality, in order to the glorifying of his name in the recovery of his elect from the power of this great potentate. What a glorious name will God have when he hath finished this war, wherein at first he found all possessed by this enemy, and not a man of all the sons of Adam to offer himself as a volunteer in this service, till made willing in the day of his power! This, this will gain God a name above every name, not only of creatures, but of those by which himself was known to his

Digitized by Google

creature. The workmanship of heaven and earth give him the name of a Creator, providence of Preserver; but this of Saviour, wherein he doth both the former, preserve the creature, which else had been lost, and create a new creature, I mean the babe of Grace, which, through God, shall be able to beat the devil out of the field, who was able to drive Adam, though created in his full stature, out of Paradise; and may not all the other works of God empty themselves as rivers into the sea, losing their names, or rather swelling into one redemption? Had not Satan taken God's elect prisoners, they would not have gone to heaven with such acclamations of triumph. There are three expressions of a great joy in Scripture, the joy of a woman after her travail, the joy of harvest, and the joy of him that divideth the spoil; the exultation of all these is wrought upon a sad ground; many a pain and tear it costs the travailing woman, many a fear the husbandman, perils and wounds the soldier, before they come at their joy, but at last are paid for all, the remembrance of their past sorrows feeding their present joys. Had Christ come and entered into affinity with our nature, and returned peaceably to heaven with his spouse, finding no resistance; though this would have been admirable love, and that would have afforded true joy of marriage, yet this way of carrying his saints to heaven will heighten the joy, as it adds to the nuptial song the triumph of a conqueror, who hath rescued his bride out of the hands of Satan, as he was leading her to the chambers of hell.

SECTION III.—*Use* 1. Is Satan such a prince? try whose subject thou art. His empire is large, only a few privileged who are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son; even in Christ's own territories (visible church, I mean), where his name is professed, and the sceptre of his gospel held forth, there Satan hath his subjects. As Christ hath his saints in Nero's court, so the devil his servants in the outward court of his visible church. Thou must therefore have something more to exempt thee from his government, than living within the pale, and giving an outward conformity to the ordinance of Christ; Satan will yield to this and be no loser: as a king lets his merchants trade to, yea, live in a foreign kingdom, and while they are there learn the language, and observe the customs of the place; this breaks not their allegiance: nor all that thy loyalty to Satan. When a statute was made in Queen Elizabeth's reign, that all should come to church, the papists sent to Rome to know the pope's pleasure; he returned them this answer, as it is said: 'Bid the catholics in England give me their heart, and let the queen take the rest.' His subject thou art whom thou crownest in thy heart, and not whom thou flatterest with thy lips.

But to bring the trial to an issue, know thou belongest to one of these, and but to one; Christ and Satan divide the whole world; Christ will bear no equal, and Satan no superior, and therefore hold in with both thou canst not. Now if thou sayest, Christ be thy Prince, answer to these interrogatories.

First, How came he into the throne? Satan had once the quiet possession of thy heart: thou wast by birth, as the rest of thy neighbours, Satan's vassal, yea, hast oft vouched him in the course of thy life to be thy liege lord; how then comes this great change? Satan surely would not of his own accord resign his crown and sceptre to Christ; and as for thyself, thou wert neither willing to renounce, nor able to resist his power: this then must only be the fruits of Christ's victorious arms, whom 'God hath exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour,' Acts v. 31. Speak, therefore, hath Christ come to thee as once Abraham to Lot, when prisoner to Chedorlaomer, rescuing thee out of Satan's hands, as he was leading thee in chains of lust to hell? Didst thou ever hear a voice from heaven in the ministry of the word calling out to thee, as once to Saul, so as to lay thee at God's foot, and make thee face about for heaven? to strike thee blind in thine own apprehension, who before had a good opinion of thy state? to tame and weaken thee, so as now thou art willing to be led by the hand of a child after Christ? Did ever Christ come to thee, as the angel to Peter in prison, rousing thee up, and not only causing the chains of darkness and stupidity to fall off thy mind and conscience, but make thee obedient also, that the iron grate of thy will hath opened to Christ before he left thee? then thou hast something to say for thy freedom. But if in all this I be a barbarian, and the language I speak be strange, thou knowest no such work to have passed upon thy spirit, then

Digitized by Google

thou art yet in thy old prison, can there be a change of government in a nation by a conqueror that invades it, and his subjects not hear of this? one king enthroned, and another crowned in thy soul, and thou hear no scuffle all this while? The regenerating Spirit is compared to the wind, John iii. 8; his first attempts on the soul may be so secret, that the creature knows not whence they come, or whither they tend; but before he hath done, the sound will be heard throughout the soul, so as it cannot but see a great change in itself, and say, I that was blind, now see: I that was as hard as ice, now relenting for sin; now my heart gives, I can melt and mourn for it: I that was well enough without a Christ, yea, did wonder what others saw in him, to make such ado for him, now have changed my note with the 'daughters of Jerusalem;' and for What is your beloved? as I scornfully have asked, I have learned to ask where he is, that I might seek him with you. O soul! canst thou say it is thus with thee? thou mayest know who has been here, no less than Christ; who, by his victorious spirit, hath translated thee from Satan's power into his own sweet kingdom.

Secondly, Whose law dost thou freely subject thyself unto? The laws of these princes are as contrary as their natures; the one a law of sin, Rom. viii. 2, the other a law of holiness, Rom. vii. 12; and therefore if sin hath not so far bereaved thee of thy wits, as not to know sin from holiness, thou mayest, except resolved to cheat thy own soul, soon be resolved; confess, therefore, and give glory to God. To which of these laws doth thy soul set its seal? When Satan sends out his proclamation, and bids, Sinner go, set thy foot upon such a command of God; observe, what is thy behaviour, dost thou yield thyself, as Paul phraseth it, Rom. vi. 16? a metaphor from princes, servants, or others, who are said to present themselves before their lord, as ready and at hand to do their pleasure; by which the apostle elegantly describes the forwardness of the sinner's heart to come to Satan's foot, when knock or call. Now doth thy soul go out thus to meet thy lust, as Aaron his brother, glad to see its face in an occasion? Thou art not brought over to sin with much ado, but thou likest the command; 'Trangress at Gilgal,' saith God, 'this liketh you well,' Hos. iv. 5. As a courtier, who doth not only obey, but thank his prince that he will employ him. Needest thou be long in resolving whose thou art? Did ever any question whether those were Jeroboam's subjects who willingly followed his command? Hos. v. 11. Alas for thee, thou art under the power of Satan, tied by a chain stronger than brass or iron: thou lovest thy lust. A saint may be for a time under a force, 'sold under sin,' as the apostle bemoans, and therefore glad when deliverance comes; but thou sellest thyself to work iniquity. If Christ should come to take thee from thy lusts, thou wouldst whine after them, as Micah after his gods.

Thirdly, To whom goest thou for protection? As it belongs to the prince to protect his subjects, so princes expect their subjects should trust them with their safety. The very bramble bids, Judg. xi. 15, 'If in truth ye anoint me king, then put your trust under my shadow.' Now who hath thy confidence? Darest thou trust God with thy soul, and the affairs of it in well doing? Good subjects follow their calling, commit state matters to the wisdom of their prince and his counsel; when wronged, they appeal to their prince in his laws for right; and when they do offend their prince, they submit to the penalty of the law, and bear his displeasure patiently, till humbling themselves they recover his favour, and do not in a discontent fall to open rebellion. Thus a gracious soul follows his Christian calling, committing himself to God as a faithful Creator, to be ordered by his wise providence. If he meets with violence from any, he scorns to beg aid of the devil to help him, or be his own judge to right himself: no, he acquiesceth in the counsel and comfort the word of God gives him. If himself offends, and so comes under the lash of God's correcting hand, he doth not then take up rebellious arms against God, and refuse to receive correction, but saith, 'Why should a living man complain; a man for the punishment of his sin?' whereas a naughty heart dares not venture his estate, life, credit, or anything he hath with God in well-doing; he thinks he shall be undone presently, if he sits still under the shadow of God's promise for protection; and therefore he runs from God as from under an old house that would fall on his head, and lays the weight of his confidence in wicked policy, making lies his

Digitized by Google

refuge; like 'Israel, he trusts in perverseness.' When God tells him, 'In returning and rest he shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be his strength;' he hath not faith to take God's word for his security in ways of obedience. And when God comes to afflict him for any disloyal carriage, instead of accepting the punishment for his sin, and so to own him for his sovereign Lord, that may righteously punish the faults of his disobedient subjects, his heart is filled with rage against God, and instead of waiting quietly and humbly, like a good subject, till God upon his repentance receives him into his favour, his wretched heart, presenting God as an enemy to him, will not suffer any such gracious or amiable thought of God to dwell in his bosom, but bids him look for no good at his hand. 'This evil is of the Lord, why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' Whereas a gracious heart is most encouraged to wait from this very consideration that drives the other away; because it is the Lord afflicts, Micah vii. 6.

Fourthly, whom dost thou sympathise with? He is thy prince, whose victories and losses thou layest to heart, whether in thy own bosom, or abroad in the world. What saith thy soul, when God hedgeth up thy way, and keeps thee from that sin which Satan hath been soliciting for? If on Christ's side, thou wilt rejoice when thou art delivered out of a temptation, though it be by falling into an affliction; as David said of Abigail, so wilt thou here, Blessed be the ordinance, blessed be the providence, which kept me from sinning against my God. But if otherwise, thou wilt harbour a secret grudge against the word which stood in the way, and be discontented thy design took not. A naughty heart, like Amnon, pines while his lust hath not vent. Again, what music do the achievements of Christ in the world make in thy ear? When thou hearest the gospel thrives, the blind see, the lame walk, the poor gospelised, doth thy spirit rejoice in that hour? If a saint, thou wilt, as God is thy Father, rejoice thou hast more brethren born; as he is thy Prince, that the multitude of his subjects increase: so when thou seest the plots of Christ's enemies discovered, powers defeated, canst thou go forth with the saints to meet King Jesus, and ring him out of the field with praises; or do thy bells ring backward, and such news make thee haste, like Haman, mourning to thine house, there to empty thy spirit, swoln with rancour against his saints and truth? Or if thy policy can master thy passion so far, as to make fair weather in thy countenance, and suffer thee to join with the people of God in their acclamations of joy, yet then art thou a close mourner within, and likest the work no better than Haman did his office, in holding Mordecai's stirrup, who had rather have held the ladder: this speaks thee a certain enemy to Christ, how handsomely soever thou mayest carry it before men.

Use 2. Bless God, O ye saints, who upon the former trial can say, you are translated into the kingdom of Christ, and so delivered from the tyranny of this usurper. There are few but have some one gaudy day in a year which they solemnise; some keep their birthday, others their marriage; some their manumission from a cruel service, others their deliverance from some eminent danger: here is a mercy where all these meet. You may call it, as Adam did his wife, Chavah, the mother of all the living; every mercy riseth up and calls this blessed; this is thy birthday; thou wert before, but begannest to live when Christ began to live in thee. The father of the prodigal dated his son's life from his return; 'This my son was dead, and is alive.' It is thy marriage day; 'I have married you to one husband, even Christ Jesus,' saith Paul to the Corinthians. Perhaps thou hast enjoyed this thy husband's sweet company many a day, and had a numerous offspring of joys and comforts by thy fellowship with him, the thought of which cannot but endear him to thee, and make the day of thy espousals delightful to thy memory. It is thy manumission: then were the indentures cancelled, wherein thou wert bound to sin and Satan: when the Son made thee free, thou becamest free indeed: thou canst not say thou wast born free, for thy father was a slave; nor that thou boughtest thy freedom with a sum; 'by grace ye are saved.' Heaven is settled on thee in the promise, and thou not at charge so much as for the writings' drawing. All is done at Christ's cost, with whom God indented, and to whom he gave the promise of eternal life before the world began, as a free estate to settle upon every

Digitized by Google

believing soul in the day they shall come to Christ, and receive him for their Prince and Saviour; so that from the hour thou didst come under Christ's shadow, all the sweet fruit that grows on this tree of life is thine; with Christ, all that both worlds have falls to thee; all is yours, because you are Christ's. O Christian, look upon thyself now, and bless thy God to see what a change there is made in thy state, since that black and dismal time when thou wast a slave to the prince of darkness; how couldst thou like thy old scullion's work again, or think of returning to thy house of bondage, now thou knowest the privileges of Christ's kingdom? Great princes, who for baseness and beggary have ascended to kingdoms and empires, to add to the joy of their present honour, have delighted to speak often of their base birth, to go and see the mean cottages where they were first entertained, and had their birth and breeding, and the like. And it is not unuseful for the Christian to look in at the grate, to see the smoky hole where once he lay, to view the chains wherewith he was laden, and so to compare Christ's court and the devil's prison, the elicity of the one and the horror of the other together. But when we do our best to affect our hearts with this mercy, by all the enhancing aggravations we can find out; alas! how little portion of it shall we know here? This is a *nimium excellens*, which cannot be fully seen, unless it be by a glorified eye; how can it be fully known by us, where it cannot be fully enjoyed? Thou art translated into the kingdom of Christ, but thou art a great way from his court; what is kept in heaven, and that the Christian know, but as the far countries, which we never saw, only by map, or some rarities that are sent us as a taste of what grows there in abundance.

Use 3. Thirdly, This, Christian, calls for thy loyalty and faithful service to Christ, who hath saved thee from Satan's bondage. Say O ye saints, to Christ, as they to Gideon, come thou and rule over us, for thou hast delivered us from the hand, not of Midian, but of Satan. Who so able to defend thee from his wrath, as he who broke his power? Who like to rule thee so tenderly, as he that could not brook another's tyranny over thee? In a word, who hath right to thee besides him, who ventured his life to redeem thee? 'That, being delivered from all thine enemies, thou mayest serve him without fear in holiness all the days of thy life.' And were it not pity that Christ should take all this pains to lift up thy head from Satan's house of bondage, and give thee a place among those in his own house, who are admitted to minister unto him (which is the highest honour the nature of men or angels is capable of), and that thou shouldest after all this be found to have a hand in any treasonable practice against thy dear Saviour? Surely Christ may think he hath deserved better at your hands, if at none besides. Where shall a prince safely dwell, if not in the midst of his own courtiers; and those such who were all taken from chains and prisons to be thus preferred, the more to oblige them in his service? Let devils and devilish men do their own work, but let not thy hand, O Christian, be upon thy Saviour. But this is too little, to bid thee not play the traitor. If thou hast any loyal blood running in thy veins, thy own heart will smite thee when thou rendest the least skirt of his holy law; thou canst as well carry burning coals in thy bosom, as hide any treason there against thy Sovereign. No, it is some noble enterprise I would have thee think upon, how thou mayest advance the name of Christ higher in thy heart, and the world too, as much as in thee lies. O how kindly did God take it, that David, when peaceably set on his throne, was casting about, not how he might entertain himself with those pleasures which usually corrupt and debauch the court of princes in times of peace, but how he might show zeal for God, in building a house for his worship, that had reared a throne for him, 2 Sam. vii. And is there nothing, Christian, thou canst think on, wherein thou mayest eminently be instrumental for God in thy generation? He is not a good subject that is all for what he can get of his prince, but never thinks what service he may do for him. Nor he the true Christian, whose thoughts dwell more on his own happiness than the honour of his God. If subjects might choose what life stands best for their own enjoyment, all would desire to live at court with their prince; but because the prince's honour is more to be valued than this, therefore noble spirits, to do their prince service, can deny themselves the delicacies of a court, to risk their lives in

Digitized by Google

the field, and thank their prince too for the honour of their employment. Paul upon these terms, was willing to have his day of coronation in glory prorogued, and he to stay as companion with his brethren in tribulation here, for the furtherance of the gospel. This indeed makes it *operæ pretium vivere*, worth the while to live, that we have by it a fair opportunity (if hearts to husband it) in which we may give a proof of our real gratitude to our God for his redeeming love in rescuing us out of the power of the prince of darkness, and translating us into the kingdom of his dear Son. And therefore, Christian, lose no time; but what thou meanest to do for God, do it quickly. Art thou a magistrate? Now it will be soon seen on whose side thou art. If indeed thou hast renounced allegiance to Satan, and taken Christ for thy prince, declare thyself an enemy to all that bear the name of Satan, and march under his colours. Study well thy commission, and when thou understandest the duty of thy place, fall to work zealously for God. Thou hast thy prince's sword put into thy hand, be sure thou use it, and take heed how thou usest it; that when called to deliver it up, and thy account also, it may not be found rusty in the sheath through sloth and cowardice, besmeared with the blood of violence, nor bent and gapped with partiality and injustice. Art thou a minister of the gospel? Thy employment is high; an ambassador, and that not from some petty prince, but the great God to his rebellious subjects; a calling so honourable, that the Son of God disdained not to come in extraordinary from heaven to perform it, called therefore the 'Messenger of the covenant;' yea, he had to this day staid on earth in person about it, had he not been called to reside as our Ambassador and Advocate in heaven with the Father: and therefore, in his bodily absence, he hath intrusted thee and a few more to carry on the treaty with sinners, which when on earth himself began. And what can you do more acceptabe to him, than to be faithful in it, as a business on which he hath set his heart so much? If ever you would see his face with joy, (you that are ambassadors,) attend to your work, and labour to bring this treaty of peace to a blessed issue between God and those you are sent to. And then if sinners will not come off, and seal the articles of the Gospel, you shall as Abraham said to his servant, be clear of your oath. Though Israel be not gathered, yet you shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord. And let not the private Christian say he is a dry tree, and can do nothing for Christ, his Prince, because he may not bear the magistrate's fruit or minister's; though thou hast not a commission to punish the sins of others with the sword of justice, yet thou mayest show thy zeal in mortifying thy own with the sword of the Spirit, and mourn for theirs also: though thou mayest not condemn them on the bench, yet thou mayest, yea, oughtest, by the power of a holy life, to convince and judge them; such a judge Lot was to the Sodomites. Though thou art not sent to preach and baptize, yet thou mayest be wonderful helpful to them who are. The Christian's prayers whet the magistrate's and minister's sword also. O pray, Christian, and pray again, that Christ's territories may be enlarged; never go to hear the word but pray, 'Thy kingdom come.' Loving princes take great content in the acclamations and good wishes of their subjects as they pass by; a *Vivat Rex*, Long live the king, coming from a loyal breath, though poor, is more worth than a subsidy from those who deny their hearts while they part with their money. Thou servest a Prince, Christian, who knows what all his subjects think of him, and he counts it his honour not to have a multitude feignedly submit to him, but to have a people that love him, and cordially like his government; who, if they were to choose their king, and make their own laws, they should live under every day, would desire no other than himself, nor any other laws than what they have already from his mouth. It was no doubt great content to David, that he had the hearts of his people so, as 'whatever the king did pleased them all,' 2 Sam. iii. 26. And surely God took it as well that what he did pleased David; for indeed David was as content under the rule and disposure of God, as the people were under his; witness the calmness of his spirit in the greatest affliction that ever befell him, 2 Sam. xv. 26: 'Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.' Loyal soul! he had rather live in exile with the good will of God, than have his throne, if God will not say, It is good for him.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE GREAT POWER SATAN HATH, NOT ONLY OVER THE ELEMENTARY AND SENSITIVE PART OF THE WORLD, BUT INTELLECTUAL ALSO—THE SOULS OF MEN.

SECTION I.—This is the second branch of the description, wherein Satan is set forth by his might and power. This gives weight to the former; were he a prince, and not able to raise a force that might appal the saints, the swelling name of a prince were contemptible; but he hath power answerable to his dignity, which in five particulars will appear.

First, In his names; Secondly, his nature; Thirdly, his number; Fourthly, his order and unity; Lastly, the mighty works that are attributed to him.

First: For the first, He hath names of great power, called the 'strong man,' Luke xi. 21, so strong, that he keeps his house in peace, in defiance of all the sons of Adam, none on earth being able to cope with this giant: Christ must come from heaven to destroy him and his works, or the field is lost. He is called the 'roaring lion,' which beast commands the whole forest; if he roars, all tremble; yea, in such a manner, as Pliny relates, that he goes amongst them, and they stand exanimated while he chooseth his prey without resistance: such a lion is Satan, who leads sinners 'captive at his will,' 2 Tim. iii. 26. 'He takes them alive,' as the word is, as the fowler the bird, which with a little scrap is enticed into the net; or as the conqueror his cowardly enemy, who has no heart to fight, but yields without contest. Such cowards the devil finds sinners; he no sooner appears in a motion, but they yield: there are but a very few noble spirits, and those are the children of the most high God, who dare valiantly oppose him, and in striving against sin resist to blood. He is called the 'great red dragon,' who with his tail, wicked men, his instruments, sweeps down the third part of the stars of heaven. 'The prince of the power of the air;' because as a prince can muster his subjects, and draw them into the field for his service, so the devil can raise the *posse cœli aerii*. In a word, he is called 'the god of this world,' 2 Cor. iv. 4, because sinners give him a god-like worship, fear him as the saints do God himself.

Secondly, The devil's nature shows his power; it is angelical. 'Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength,' Psa. ciii. 20. Strength is put for angels, Psa. lxxviii. 25. 'They did eat angels' food;' Heb., 'the food of the mighty.' In two things the power of angelical nature will appear—in its superiority, and in its spirituality.

First, Its superiority. Angels are the top of the creation; man himself made a little lower than the angels. Now in the works of creation, the superior hath a power over the inferior; the beasts over the grass and herb, man over the beasts, and angels over man.

Secondly, The spirituality of their nature. The weakness of man is from his flesh: his soul, made for great enterprises, but weighed down with a lump of flesh, is forced to row with a strength suitable to its weaker partner; but now the devils, being angels, have no such encumbrance' no fumes from a fleshly part to cloud their understanding, which is clear and piercing; no clog at their heel to retard their motion, which for swiftness is set out by the wind and flame of fire; yea, being spiritual, they cannot be resisted with carnal force; fire and sword hurt them not; the angel which appeared to Manoah went up in the fire that consumeth the sacrifice. Such hath been the dotage, and is at this day, of superstitious ones, that they think to charm the devil with their carnal exorcisms; hence the Romish relics, cross, holy water; yea, and among the Jews themselves in corrupter times, who thought by their phylactories and circumcision to scare away the devil, which made some of them expound that, Cant. iii. 8, of circumcision, 'Every man hath his sword on his thigh, because of fear in the night.' By sword on the thigh, they expound circumcision, which they will vainly have given as a charm against evil spirits that affright them in the night. But alas! the devil cares for none of these, no, not for an ordinance of God, when by fleshly confidence we make it a spell: he hath been often bound with these fetters and chains (as it is said of him in the gospel), and

Digitized by Google

the chains have been plucked asunder by him, neither could any man thus tame him. He esteems, as Job saith of the Leviathan, 'iron as straw, and brass as rotten wood.' It must be a stronger than the strong man must bind him, and none stronger but God, the Father of spirits. The devil lost, indeed, by his fall, much of his power, in relation to that holy and happy state in which he was created, but not his natural abilities; he is an angel still, and hath an angel's power.

Thirdly, The number of devils adds to their power. What lighter than the sand? yet number makes it weighty. What creatures less than lice? yet what plague greater to the Egyptians? How formidable then must devils be, who are both for nature so mighty, and for number such a multitude! There are devils enough to besiege the whole earth; not a place under heaven where Satan hath not his troops; not a person without some of these cursed spirits hunting and watching him wherever he goes; yea, for some special service he can send a legion to keep garrison in one single person; as Mark v.; and if so many can be spared to attend one, to what a number would the muster-roll of Satan's whole army amount, if known; And now tell me, if we are not like to find our march difficult to heaven (if ever we mean to go thither), that are to pass through the very quarters of this multitude, who are scattered over the face of all the earth? When armies are disbanded, and the roads full of debauched soldiers, wandering up and down, it is dangerous travelling: we hear then of murders and robberies from all quarters. These powers of hell are that party of angels, who, for their mutiny and disobedience, were cashiered heaven, and thrust out of that glorious host; and ever since they have straggled here below, endeavouring to do mischief to the children of men, especially travelling in heaven's road.

Fourthly, Their unity and order makes their number formidable. We cannot say there is love among them, that heavenly fire cannot live in the devil's bosom; yet there is unity and order as to this, they are all agreed in their designs against God and man; so their unity and consent is knit together by the ligaments, not of love, but of hatred and policy; hatred against God and his children, which they are filled with; and policy, which tells them, that if they agree not in their design, their kingdom cannot stand. And how true they are to this wicked brotherhood, our Saviour gives a fair testimony, when he saith, 'Satan fights not against Satan.' Did you ever hear of any mutiny in the devil's army? or that any of those apostate angels did freely yield up one soul to Christ? They are many, and yet but one spirit of wickedness among them all. 'My name,' said the devils (not our name), 'is legion.' The devil is called the Leviathan, Isa. xxvii. 1, 'The Lord with his strong sword shall punish Leviathan,' from their cleaving together, being of close compact, or joined together, a phrase used for the whale, Job iv., whose strength lies in his scales, which are so knit, that he is, as it were, covered with armour. Thus these cursed spirits do accord in their machinations, and labour to bring their instruments into the same league with them, not contented with their bare obedience, but, where they can obtain it, do require an express oath of their servants to be true to them, as in witches.

Fifthly, The mighty works that are attributed to these evil spirits, in Scripture, declare their power, and these either respect the elementary, sensible, or intellectual part of the world. The elementary, what dreadful effects this prince of the power of the air is able to produce on that, see in the word; he cannot indeed make the least breath of air, drop of water, or spark of fire, but he can, if let loose, as reverend master Caryl saith on Job i., go to God's storehouse, and make use of these in such a sort, as no man can stand before him; he can hurl the sea into such a commotion, that the depths shall boil like a pot, and disturb the air into storms and tempests, as if heaven and earth would meet. Job's children were buried in the ruins of their house by a puff of his mouth; yea, he can go to God's magazine, as the former author saith, and let off the great ordnance of heaven, causing such dreadful thunder and lightning as shall not only affright, but do real execution, and that in a more dreadful way than in the ordinary course of nature. If man's art can so sublimate nature, as we see in the invention of powder, that hath such a strange force

Digitized by Google

much more able is he to draw forth its power. Again, over the sensitive world his power is great; not only the beasts, as in the herd of swine hurried by him into the deep, but over the bodies of men also, as in Job, whose sore boils were not the breakings out of a distempered nature, but the print of Satan's fangs on his flesh, doing that suddenly, which in nature would have required more time to gather and ripen; and the demoniacs in the gospel grievously vexed and tormented by him. But this the devil counts small game; his great spite is at the souls of men, which I call the intellectual world; his cruelty to the body is for the soul's sake. As Christ's pity to the bodies of men, when on earth, healing their diseases, was in a subserviency to the good of their souls, bribing them with those mercies suitable to their carnal desires, that they might more willingly receive mercies for their souls from that hand which was so kind to their bodies; as we give children something that pleaseth them, to persuade them to do something that pleaseth them not, go to school, learn their book; so the devil, who is cruel as Christ is meek, and wisheth good neither to body nor soul, yet shews his cruelty to the body, but on a design against the soul, knowing well that the soul is soon discomposed by the perturbation of the other; the soul cannot but lightly hear, and so have its peace and rest broken by the groans and complaints of the body, under whose very roof it dwells; and then it is not strange, if as for want of sleep the tongue talk idly, so the soul should break out into some sinful carriage, which is the bottom of the devil's plot on a saint. And as for other poor silly souls, he gains little less than a godlike fear and dread from them by that power he puts forth, through Divine permission, in smiting their goods, beasts, and bodies, as among the Indians at this day. Yea, there are many among ourselves plainly shew what a throne Satan hath in their hearts upon this account, such who, as if there were not a God in Israel, go for help and cure to his doctors,—wizards I mean. And truly, had Satan no other way to work his will on the souls of men, but by this advantage he takes from the body, yet considering the degeneracy of man's state, how low his soul is sunk beneath its primitive extraction, how the body which was a lightsome house, is now become a prison to it; that which was its servant, is now become its master; it is no wonder he is able to do so much. But besides this, he hath, as a spirit, a nearer way of access to the soul, and has a superior spirit yet more over man, a lower creature. And above all, having got within the soul, by man's fall, he hath now far more power than before; so that where he meets not resistance from God, he carries all before him; as in the wicked, whom he hath so at his devotion, that he is, in a sense, said to do that in them which God doth in the saints. God works effectually in them, Gal. ii. 8; 1 Thess. ii. 13. Satan worketh effectually in the children of disobedience, Eph. ii. 2, *energountos*, the same word with the former places; he is in a manner efficacious with them, as the Holy Spirit with the other. His delusions strong, 2 Thess. ii. 11. They returned not *re infecta*. The Spirit 'enlightens;' he 'blinds' the minds of those that believe not, 2 Cor. iv. 4. The Spirit 'fills' the saints, Ephes. v. 18; 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart?' saith Peter to Ananias, Acts v. 3. 'The Spirit fills with knowledge, and the fruits of righteousness;' Satan fills with envy and all unrighteousness. The Holy Spirit fills with comfort; Satan the wicked with terrors: as in Saul vexed by an evil spirit; and Judas, into whom it is said he entered, and when he had satisfied his lust upon him, as Amnon on Tamar, shuts the door of mercy upon him, and makes him that was even now traitor to his Master, hangman to himself. And though saints be not the proper subjects of his power, yet they are the chief objects of his wrath; his foot stands on the wicked's back, but he wrestles with these, and when God steps aside, he is far above their match: he hath sent the strongest among them home, trembling and crying to their God, with the blood running about their consciences. He is mighty, both as a tempter to and for sin, knowing the state of the Christian's affairs so well, and able to throw his fire-balls so far into the inward senses, whether they be of lust or horror, and to blow up these with such unwearied solicitations, that if they at first meet not with some suitable dispositions in the Christian, at which, as from loose corners of powder, they may take fire, which is most ordinary, yet in time he may bring over the creature by the length of the siege, and

Digitized by Google

continued volleys of such motions, to listen to a parley with them, if not a yielding to them. Thus many times he even wearies out the soul with importunity.

SECTION II.—*Use* 1. First, let this, O man, make the plumes of thy pride fall, whoever thou art that gloriest in thy power; hadst thou more than thou or any of the sons of Adam ever had, yet what is all that to the power of these angels? Is it the strength of thy body thou gloriest in? Alas, what is the strength of frail flesh, to the force of their spiritual nature? Thou art no more to these than a child to a giant, a worm to a man; who could tear up the mountains, and hurl the world into a confusion, if God would but suffer them. Is it the strength of thy parts above others? Dost thou not see what fools he makes of the wisest among men? winding them about as a sophister would do an idiot, making them believe light is dark, bitter is sweet, and sweet bitter; were not the strength of his parts admirable, could he make a rational creature, as a man is, so absurdly throw away his scarlet, and embrace dung? I mean, part with God and the glorious happiness he hath in him, in hope to mend himself by embracing sin. Yet this he did when man had his best wits about him in innocency. Is it the power of place and dignity got by warlike achievement? Grant thou were able to subdue nations, and give laws to the whole world, yet even then without grace from above thou wouldst be his slave. And he himself, for all this his power, is a cursed spirit, the most miserable of all God's creatures, and the more, because he hath so much power to do mischief; has the devil lost all his angelical abilities, when he fell, he had gained by his loss. Therefore tremble, O man, at any power thou hast, except thou usest it for God. Art thou strong in body? Who hath thy strength? God, or thy lusts? Some are strong to drink, strong to sin; 'thy hand shall therefore be stronger,' Isa. xxviii. 22. Hast thou power by thy place to do God and his church service, but no heart to lay it out for them, but rather against them? Thou and the devil shall be tried at the same bar; it seems thou meanest to go to hell for something, thou wilt carry thy full lading thither. No greater plague can befall a man than power without grace. Such great ones in the world, while here, make a brave show, like chief-commanders and field-officers at the head of their regiments; the common soldiers are poor creatures to them: but when the army is beaten, and all taken prisoners, then they fling off their scarf and feather, and would be glad to pass for the meanest in the army. Happy would devils be, princes and great ones in the world be, if then they could appear in the habit of some poor sneaks to receive their sentence as such: but then their titles, and dignity, and riches shall be read, not for their honour, but for their shame and damnation.

Use 2. Secondly. It shews the folly of those that think it such an easy matter to get heaven. If the devil be so mighty, and heaven's way so full of them, then sure it will cost hot water before we display our banners upon the walls of the New Jerusalem. Yet it is plain many think otherwise, by the provision they make for their march. If you should see a man walking forth without a cloak, or with a very thin one, you will say, Surely he fears no foul weather; or one riding a long journey alone, and without arms, you will conclude he expects no thieves on the road. All, if you ask them, will tell you they are on their way to heaven; but how few care for the company of the saints, as if they needed not their fellowship on their journey! Most go naked, without so much as anything like armour, have not enough to gain the name of professors at large; others, it may be, will shew you some vain flighty hopes on the mercy of God, without any Scripture-bottom for the same, and with these content themselves, which will, like a rusty unsound pistol, fly in their own face when they come to use it; and is it any wrong to say these make nothing of getting heaven? Surely these men, many of whom thrive so well in the world, never got their estates with so little care as they think to get heaven. Ask them why they follow their trade so close, they will tell you, estates are not got by sleeping, families are not provided for with the hands in the pocket, they meet with many rooks and cheaters in their dealing, who, should they not look to themselves, would soon undo them; and are there none that thou needest fear will put a cheat on thy soul, and bereave thee of thy crown of glory if they can? Thou art blinder than the prophet's servant,

Digitized by Google

if thou seest not more devils encompassing thee than he saw men about Samaria. Thy worldly trade they will not hinder, nay, may be, help thee to sinful tricks in that, to hinder thee in this: but if once thou resolvest to seek out for Christ and his grace, they will oppose thee to thy face; they are under an oath, as Paul's enemies were, to take away the life of thy soul if they can; desperate creatures themselves, who know their doom is irrevocable; and sell their own lives they will as dear as they can. Now what folly is it to betray thy soul into their hands, when Christ stands by to be thy convoy! Out of him thou art a lost creature, thou canst not defend thyself alone against Satan, nor with Satan against God. Close with Christ, and thou art delivered from one of thy enemies, and him the most formidable, God I mean; yea, he is become thy friend, who will stick close to thee in thy conflict with the other.

Use 3. Thirdly, To the saints. Be ye not dismayed at this report which the Scripture makes of Satan's power; let them fear him who fear not God. What are these mountains of power and pride before thee, O Christian, who servest a God that can make a worm thrash a mountain? The greatest hurt he can do thee, is by nourishing this false fear of him in thy bosom. It is observed, Bernard saith, of some beast in the forest, *Plerunque superant leonem ferientem, quæ non sustinent rugientem;* though they are too hard for the lion in fight, yet tremble when he roars. Thus the Christian, when he comes to the pinch, indeed, is able, through Christ, to trample Satan under his feet; yet before the conflict, stands trembling at the thought of him. Labour, therefore, to get a right understanding of Satan's power, and then this lion will not appear so fierce as you paint him in your melancholy fancy. Three considerations will relieve you, when at any time you are beset with the fears of his power.

First, It is derived power; he hath it not in himself, but by patent from another, and that no other but God: 'All powers are of him,' whether on earth or in hell. This truth, subscribed in faith, would, First, secure thee, Christian, that Satan's power shall never hurt thee. Would thy Father give him a sword to mischief thee his child? 'I have created the smith,' saith God, 'that bloweth the coals; I have created the waster to destroy;' and therefore assures them, that 'no weapon formed against them shall prosper,' Isa. liv. 16, &c. If God provides his enemies arms, they shall, I warrant you, be such as will do them little service. When Pilate thought to scare Christ with what he could do towards the saving or taking away of his life, he replies, 'that he could do nothing except it were given from above,' John xix. 10; as if he had said, Do your worst, I know who sealed your commission.

Secondly, This considered, would meeken and quiet the souls, when troubled by Satan within, or his instruments without. It is Satan buffets, man persecutes me, but God who gives them both power; 'The Lord,' saith David, 'bids him curse;' 'The Lord,' saith Job, 'hath given, and the Lord hath taken.' This kept the king's peace in both their bosoms. O Christian, look not at the jailor that whips thee; may be he is cruel; but read the warrant; who wrote that? and at the bottom thou shalt find thy father's hand.

Secondly, Satan's power is limited, and that two ways; he cannot do what he will; and he shall not do what he can.

First, He cannot do what he will. His desires are boundless; they walk not only to and fro here below, but in heaven itself where he is pulling down his once fellow-angels, knocking down the carved work of that glorious temple, as with axes and hammers; yea, dethroning God, and setting himself in his place: this fool saith in his heart, There is no God; but he cannot do this, nor many other things which his cankered malice stirs him up to wish; he is but a creature, and so hath the length of his tether, to which he is staked, and cannot exceed; and if God be safe, then thou also, for thy life is hid with Christ in God; 'if I live,' saith Christ, 'you shall live also.' You are engraven on the table of his heart; if he pluck one away, he must the other also. Again as he cannot hurt the being of God, so he cannot pry into the bosom of God. He knows not man's, much less God's thoughts. The astrologers nor their master could bring back Nebuchadnezzar's dream. As men have their closets for their own privacy, where none can enter in but with their key, so God keeps the heart as his withdrawing-room, shut to all besides himself; and

Digitized by Google

therefore when he takes upon him to foretell events, if God teach him not his lesson, nor second causes help him, he is beside his book; so, to save his credit, delivers them dubiously, that his text may bear a gloss suitable to the effect, whatever it is. And when he is bold to tell the state of a person, there is no weight to be laid on his judgment; Job was an hypocrite in his mouth, but God proved him a liar. Again, Thirdly, he cannot hinder those purposes and counsels of God he knows. He knew Christ was to come in the flesh, and did his worst, but could not hinder his landing; though there were many devices in his heart, yet the counsel of the Lord concerning him did stand, yea, was delivered by the midwifery of Satan's suggesting, and his instruments executing his lust, as they thought, but fulfilling God's counsel against themselves. Fourthly, He cannot ravish thy will; *Diabolus non est jussor vitiorum, sed incentor*. He cannot command thee to sin against thy will; he can *motum agere*, make the soul go faster that is on its way, as the wind carries the tide with more swiftness, but he cannot turn the stream of the heart contrary to its own course and tendency.

Secondly, Satan's power is so limited, that he shall not do what he can: God lets out so much of his wrath as shall praise him, and be as a stream to set his purpose of love to his saints at work, and then lets down the flood-gate, by restraining the residue thereof. God ever takes him off before he can finish his work on a saint. He can, if God suffers him, rob the Christian of much of his joy, and disturb his peace by his cunning insinuation; but he is under command; he stands like a dog by the table, while the saints sit at this sweet feast of comfort, but dares not stir to disturb their cheer; his Master's eye is on him. The want of this consideration loseth God his praise, and us our comfort, God having locked up our comfort in the performance of our duty. Did the Christian consider what Satan's power is, and who dams it up, this would always be a song of praise in his mouth. Hath Satan power to rob and burn, kill and slay, torment the body, distress the mind? Whom may I thank that I am in any of these out of his hands? Doth Satan love one better than Job? or am I out of sight, or beside his walk? Is his courage cooled, or his wrath appeased, that I escape so well? No, none of these; his wrath is not against one, but all the saints; his eye is on thee, and his arm can reach thee; his spirit is not cowed, nor his stomach stayed with those millions he hath devoured, but keen, as ever, yea, sharper, because now he sees God ready to take away, and the end of the world drawing on so fast. It is thy God alone whom thou art beholden to for all this; his eye keepeth thee; when Satan finds the good man asleep, then he finds our good God awake; therefore thou art not consumed, because he changeth not. Did his eye slumber or wander one moment, there would need no other flood to drown thee, yea, the whole world, than what would come out of this dragon's mouth.

Thirdly, Satan's power is ministerial, appointed by God for the service and benefit of the saints: it is true, as it is said of the proud Assyrian, 'He meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so,' Isa. x. 7; but it is in his heart to destroy those he tempts: but no matter what he thinks: as Luther comforted himself, when told what had passed at the diet of Nuremberg against the Protestants, 'that it was decreed one way there, but otherwise in heaven;' so for the saints' comfort, the thoughts which God thinks to them are peace, while Satan's are ruin to their graces, and destruction to their souls; and his counsel shall stand in spite of the devil. The very mittimus which God makes, when he commits any of his saints to the devil's prison, runs thus: 'Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus,' 1 Cor. v. 5. So that tempted saints may say, We had perished if we had not perished to our own thinking, This Leviathan while he thinks to swallow them up, is but sent of God, as the whale to Jonah, to waft them safe to land. 'Some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge them, and to make them white,' Dan. xi. 35. This God intends when he lets his children fall into temptation, as we do with our linen; the spots they get at our feasts are taken out by washing, rubbing, and laying them out to bleach. The saints' spots are most in peace, plenty, and prosperity, and they never recover their whiteness to such a degree, as when they come from under Satan's

Digitized by Google

scouring. We do too little not to fear Satan; we should comfort ourselves with the usefulness and subserviency of his temptations to our good. 'All things are yours,' who are Christ's. He that hath given life to be yours, hath given death also. He that hath given heaven for your inheritance, Paul and Cephas, his ministers and ordinances, to help you thither, hath given the world, with all the afflictions of it, yea, the prince of it too, with all his wrath and power, in order to the same end. This, indeed, is love and wisdom in a riddle; but you who have the spirit of Christ can unfold it.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE TIME WHEN, THE PLACE WHERE, AND THE SUBJECTS WHOM SATAN RULES.

Against the rulers of the darkness of this world.

THESE words contain the third branch in the description of our great enemy the devil: and they hold forth the proper seat of his empire, with a threefold boundary; he is not 'lord over all,' that is the incommunicable title of God: but a 'ruler of the darkness of this world,' where the time, place, and subjects of his empire are stinted.

1. The time when this prince hath his rule 'in this world;' that is, now, not hereafter.

2. The place where he rules, 'in this world;' that is, here below, not in heaven.

3. The subjects, or persons whom he rules; not all in this lower world neither; and they are wrapped up in these words, 'The darkness of this world.' First, of the first boundary.

SECTION I.—1. The time when he rules; so this word *world*, may be taken in the text for that little spot of time, which, like an inconsiderable parenthesis, is clasped in on either side with vast eternity, called sometimes the 'present world,' Tit. ii. 12. On this stage of time, this mock king acts the part of a prince; but when Christ comes to take down this scaffold at the end of this world, then he shall be degraded; his crown taken off, his sword broken over his head, and he hissed off with scorn and shame; yea, of a prince, become a close prisoner in hell: no more then shall he infest the saints, no, nor rule the wicked; but he with them, and they with him, shall lie under the immediate execution of God's wrath. For this very end Christ hath his patent and commission, which he will not give up, 'till he shall have put down all rule,' 1 Cor. xv. 24, 25. Then, and not till then, will he deliver up his economical kingdom to his Father, when he shall have put down all rule; 'for he must reign till he have put all enemies under his feet.' Satan is cast already; his doom is passed upon him, as Adam's was upon his first sin; but full execution is stayed till the end of the world. The devil knows it; it is an article in his creed which made him tremblingly ask Christ, Why he came, 'to torment him before his time?'

Use 1. First, This brings ill news to the wicked. Your prince cannot long sit in his throne; sinners at present have a merry time of it, if it would hold; they rejoice, while Christ's disciples weep and mourn; they rustle in their silks, while the saint goes in his rags. Princes are not more careful to oblige their courtiers with pensions and preferments, than the devil is to gratify his followers. He hath his rewards also; 'All this will I give thee.' 'Am not I able to promote thee?' saith Balak to Balaam. O it is strange, and yet not strange, considering the degeneracy of man's nature, to see how Satan carries sinners after him with this golden hook! Let him but present such a bait as honour, pelf, or pleasure, and their hearts skip after it as a dog would at a crust; he makes them sin for a morsel of bread. O the naughty heart of man loves the wages of unrighteousness, which the devil promiseth, so dearly, that it fears not the dreadful wages which the great God threatens! As sometimes you shall see a spaniel so greedy of a bone, that he will leap into the very river for it, if you throw it thither, and by that time he comes with much ado thither, it is sunk, and he gets nothing but a mouthful of water for his pains: thus sinners will catch at their desired pleasures, honours, and profits, swimming through the very threatenings of the word to them, and oftentimes they lose

Digitized by Google

even what they gaped for here. Thus 'God kept Balaam,' as Balak told him, 'from honour,' Numb. xxiv. 11. But, however they speed here, they are sure to lose themselves everlastingly, without repentance. They that are resolved they will have these things, are the men that fall into the devil's snare, and are led into those foolish and hurtful lusts which will drown them in destruction and perdition, 1 Tim. vi. 9. O poor sinners! were it not wisdom, before you truck with the devil, to inquire what title he can give you to these goodly vanities? Will he settle them as a free estate upon you? Can he secure your bargain, and keep you from suits of law? Or is he able to put two lives into the purchase, that when you die you may not be left destitute in another world? Alas, poor wretches! you shall ere long see what a cheat he hath put on you, from whom you are like to have nought but *caveat emptor*. Let the buyer look to that. Yea, this great prince, that is so brag to tell what he will give you, must down himself; and a sad prince must needs make a sad court. O what howling will there then be of Satan and his vassals together! O, but, saith the sinner, the pleasures and honours sin and Satan offer are present, and that which Christ promiseth we must stay for. This, indeed, is that which takes most. 'Demas,' saith Paul, 'forsook me, having loved this present world,' 2 Tim. iv. 10. It is present indeed, sinners, for you cannot say it will be yours the next moment; your present felicity is going, and the saints', though future, is coming never to go. And who, for a gulp of pottage, and sensual enjoyments at present, would part with a reversion of such a kingdom? except thou art of his mind, who thought he had nothing but what he had swallowed down his throat,

Hæc habeo quæ edi, quæque exaturata libido
Hausit.——

Which Cicero could say, was more fit to be writ on an ox's grave than a man's. Vile wretch, that thinkest it is not better to deal with God for time, than the devil for ready pay! Tertullian wonders at the folly of the Roman ambition, who would endure all manner of hardship in field and fight, for no other thing but to obtain at last the honour to be consul, which he calls *unius anni volaticum gaudium*, a joy that flies away at the year's end. But O what a desperate madness is it for sinners then, not to endure a little hardship here, but entail on themselves the eternal wrath of God hereafter, for the short feast and running banquet their lusts entertain them here withal, which often is not *gaudium unius horæ*, a joy that lasts an hour.

Use 2. Secondly, Let this encourage thee, O Christian, in thy conflict with Satan; the skirmish may be sharp, but it cannot be long. Let him tempt thee, and his wicked instruments trounce thee; it is but a little while, and thou shalt be rid of both their evil neighbourhoods. The cloud, while it drops, is rolling over thy head, and then comes fair weather, and eternal sunshine of glory. Canst thou not watch with Christ one hour or two? keep the field a few days? If yield, thou art undone for ever; persevere but until the battle be over, and thine enemy shall never rally more: bid faith look through the keyhole of the promise, and tell thee what it sees there laid up for him that overcomes; bid it listen and tell thee, whether it cannot hear the shouts of those crowned saints, as of those that are dividing the spoil, and receiving the reward of all their services and sufferings here on earth: and dost thou stand on the other side, afraid to wet thy foot with those sufferings and temptations, which, like a little plash of water, run between thee and glory?

SECTION II.—Secondly, The devil's empire is confined to place as well as time; he is the ruler of this lower world, not of the heavenly. The highest the devil can go is the air, called the prince thereof, as being the utmost marches of his empire; he hath nothing to do with the upper world. Heaven fears no devil, and therefore its gates stand always open; never durst this fiend look into the holy place since he was first expelled, but rangeth to and fro here below, as a vagabond creature, excommunicated the presence of God, doing what mischief he can to saints on their way to heaven. But is not this matter of great joy, that Satan hath no power there where the saints' happiness lies? What hast thou, Christian, which thou needest value, that is not there? Thy Christ is there, and, if thou lovest him, thy heart also, which lives in the bosom of its

Digitized by Google

Beloved. Thy friends and kindred in Christ are there, or expected, with whom thou shalt have a happy meeting in thy Father's house, notwithstanding the snare on Tabor, the plots of Satan which lie in the way. O friends, get a title to that kingdom, and you are above the flight of this kite. This made Job a happy man indeed, who, when the devil had plundered him to his skin, and worried him almost out of that too, could then vouch Christ in the face of death and devils to be his Redeemer, whom he should with those eyes, that now stood full with brinish tears, behold, and that for himself as his own portion. It is sad with him indeed, who is robbed of all he is worth at once; but this can never be said of a saint. The devil took away Job's purse, as I may say, which put him into some straits, but he had a God in heaven that put him into stock again. Some spending money thou hast at present in thy purse, in the activity of thy faith, the evidence of thy sonship, and comfort flowing from the same, enlargement in duty, and the like, which Satan may for a time disturb, yea, deprive thee of, but he cannot blot thy name out of the book of life; he cannot annul thy faith, make void thy relation, dry up thy comfort in the spring, though he may dam up the stream; nor hinder thee a happy issue of thy whole war with sin, though he may worst thee in a private skirmish; these all are kept in heaven, among God's own crown jewels, who is said to keep us by his power 'through faith unto salvation.'

SECTION III.—The third boundary of the devil's principality is in regard of his subjects, and they are described here to be 'the darkness of this world,' that is, such as are in darkness. This word is used sometimes to express the desolate condition of a creature in some great distress, Isa. l.: 'He that walks in darkness, and sees no light:' sometimes to express the nature of all sin; so Ephes. v. 1, sin is called the work of darkness: sometimes the particular sin of ignorance; often set out by the darkness of the night, blindness of the eye: all these I conceive may be meant, but chiefly the latter; for though Satan makes a foul stir in the soul; that is, in the darkness of sorrow, whether it be from outward crosses, or inward desertions; yet if the creature be not in the darkness of sin at the same time, though he may disturb his peace as an enemy, yet cannot be said to rule as a prince. Sin only sets Satan in the throne; so that I shall take the words in the two latter interpretations.

First, For the darkness of sin in general.

Secondly, For the darkness of ignorance in special; and the sense will be, that the devil's rule is over those that are in a state of sin and ignorance, not over those who are sinful or ignorant; so he would take hold of saints as well as others; but over those who are in a state of sin, which is set out by the abstract, 'ruler of the darkness,' the more to express the fulness of the sin and ignorance that possesseth Satan's slaves; and the notes will be two.

First, Every soul in a state of sin is under the rule of Satan.

Secondly, Ignorance, above other things, enslaves a soul to Satan; and therefore all sins are set out by that which chiefly expresseth this—viz., darkness.

Doct. Every soul in a state of sin is under the rule of Satan; under which point these two things must be inquired;—

First, The reason why sin is set out by darkness.

Secondly, How every one in such a state appears to be under the devil's rule.

For the first.

First, Sin may be called darkness, because the spring and common cause of sin in man is darkness. The external cause Satan, who is the great promoter of it; he is a cursed spirit, held in chains of darkness. The internal is the blindness and darkness of the soul: we may say when any one sins, he doth he knows not what, as Christ said of his murderers. Did the creature know the true worth of the soul, which he now sells for a song, the glorious, amiable nature of God and his holy ways, the matchless love of God in Christ, the poisonous nature of sin, and all these not by a sudden beam darted into the window at a sermon, and gone again, like a flash of lightning, but by an abiding light; this would spoil the devil's market, and poor creatures would not readily take this toad into their bosom; sin goes in a disguise, and so is welcome.

Secondly, It is darkness, because it brings darkness into the soul, and that naturally and judicially.

Digitized by Google

First, Naturally. There is a noxious quality in sin offensive to the understanding, which is to the soul what the eye and palate are to the body; it discerns things, and distinguishes true from false, as the eye white from black; it trieth words as the mouth tasteth meats. Now as there are some things bad for the sight, and others bad for the palate, vitiating it, so that it shall not know sweet from bitter; so here sin besots the creature, and makes it injudicious, that he who could see such a practice absurd and base in others before, when once he had drank of this enchanting cup himself, as one that hath lost his understanding, is maddened by it himself, not able now to see the evil of it, or use his reason against it. Thus Saul, before he had debauched his conscience, thought the witch worthy of death; but after he had trodden his conscience hard with other foul sins, went to ask counsel of one himself.

Again, sin brings darkness judicially; such have been threatened, whose ear God hath been trying to open and instruct, and have run out of God's school into the devil's, by 'rebelling against light,' that they shall 'die without knowledge,' Job xxxvi. 10-12. What! should the candle burn waste, when the creature hath more mind to play than work?

Thirdly, Sin runs into darkness. Impostors bring in their 'damnable heresies privily,' like those who sell bad ware, loth to come to the market, where the standard tries all, but put it off in secret: so in moral wickedness, sinners, like beasts, go out in the night for their prey, loth to be seen, afraid to come where they should be found out. Nothing more terrible to sinners than the light of truth, John iii. 19, 'because their deeds are evil.' Felix was so nettled with what Paul spake, that he could not sit out the sermon, but runs away in haste, and adjourns the hearing of Paul till a convenient season, but he never could find one. The sun is not more troublesome in hot countries, than truth is to those who sit under the powerful preaching of it; and, therefore, as those seldom come abroad in the heat of the day, and, when they must, have their devices over their heads to screen them from the sun; so sinners shun as much as may be the preaching of the word; but if they must go, to keep in with their relations, or for other carnal advantages, they, if possible, will keep off the power of truth, either by sleeping the sermon away, or prating it away with any foolish imagination which Satan sends to bear them company and chat with them at such a time; or, by choosing such a cool preacher to sit under, whose toothless discourse shall rather flatter than trouble, rather tickle their fancy than prick their consciences; and then their sore eyes can look upon the light. *Florescentem amant veritatem qui non redarguentur;* they dare handle and look on the sword with a delight, when in a rich scabbard, who would run away to see it drawn.

Fourthly, Sin is darkness for its uncomfortableness, and that in a threefold respect.

First, Darkness is uncomfortable, as it shuts out of all employment. What could the Egyptians do under the plague of darkness, but sit still? and this to an active spirit is trouble enough. Thus, in a state of sin man is an unserviceable creature; he can do his God no service acceptably, spoils everything he takes in hand, like one running up and down in a shop, with windows shut, who doth nothing right. It may be writ on the grave of every sinner, who lives and dies in that state: 'Here lies the man that never did God an hour's work in all his life.'

Secondly, Darkness is uncomfortable in point of enjoyment; be there ever such rare pictures in the room, if dark, who is the better? A soul in a state of sin may possess much, but enjoys nothing. This is a sore evil, and little thought of. One thought of its state of enmity to God, would drop bitterness into every cup; all he hath smells of hell-fire; and a man at a rich feast would enjoy it sure but little if he smelt fire, ready to burn his house and himself.

Thirdly, Darkness fills with terrors; fears in the night are most dreadful; a state of sin is a state of fear. Men that owe much, have no quiet, but when they are asleep, and not then either, the cares and fears of the day sink so deep, as makes their rest troublesome and unquiet in the night. The wicked hath no peace, but when his conscience sleeps, and that sleeps but slightly, awaking often with sick fits of terror: when he hath most prosperity, he is

Digitized by Google

scared like a flock of birds in a corn field, at every piece going off. He eats in fear, and drinks in fear: when afflicted, he expects worse behind, and knows not what this cloud may spread to, and where it may lay him, whither in hell or not he knows not, and therefore trembles, as one in the dark, not knowing but his next step may be into the pit.

Fifthly, Sin leads to utter darkness; utter darkness is darkness to the utmost; sin in its full height, and wrath in its full heat, together; both universal, both eternal. Here is some mixture, peace and trouble, pain and ease, sin and thoughts of repenting, sin and hopes of pardon; there the fire of wrath shall burn without slacking, and sin run parallel with torment: hell-birds are no changelings; their torment makes them sin, and their sin feeds their torment, both unquenchable, one being fuel to another.

Secondly, Let us see how it appears, that such as are under a state of sin, are under the rule of Satan. Sinners are called the children of the devil, 1 John iii. 10; and who rules the child but the father? They are slaves; who rules the slave but the master? They are the very mansion-house of the devil; where hath a man command, but in his own house? 'I will go to my house,' Matt. xii. 44. As if the devil had said, I have walked among the saints of God, to and fro, knocking at this door and that, and none will bid me welcome; I can find no rest; well, I know where I may be bold; I'll even go to my own house, and there I am sure to rule the roast without control; and, when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and garnished;' that is, all ready for his entertainment. Servants make the house trim and handsome against their master comes home, especially when he brings guests with him, as here the devil brings 'seven more.'

Look to the sinner; there is nothing he is or hath, but the devil hath dominion over it: 'he rules the whole man,' their minds blinding them. All the sinner's apprehension of things are shaped by Satan: he looks on sin with the devil's spectacles; he reads the word with the devil's comment: he sees nothing in its native colours, but is under a continual delusion. The very wisdom of a wicked man is said to be 'devilish, Jam. iii. 15; or devil-like, because taught by the devil, and also such as the devil's is, 'wise only to do evil.' 'He commands their wills,' though not to force them, yet effectually to draw them 'His work,' saith Christ, 'ye will do.' You are resolved on your way, the devil hath got your hearts, and him ye will obey: and therefore when Christ comes to recover his throne, he finds the soul in an uproar, as Ephesus at Paul's sermon, crying him down, and Diana up. We will not have this man to reign over us; what is the Almighty that we should serve him? 'He rules over all their members;' they are called 'weapons of unrighteousness;' all at the devil's service; as all the arms of a kingdom, to defend the prince against any that shall invade. The head to plot, the hand to act, the feet swift to carry the body up and down about his service; 'he rules over all that he hath.' Let God come in a poor member, and beseech him to lend him a penny, or bestow a morsel to refresh his craving heart, and the covetous wretch's hand of charity is withered, that he cannot stretch it forth: but let Satan call, and his purse flies open, and his heart also. Nabal, that could not spare a few fragments for David and his followers, could make 'a feast like a prince,' to satisfy his own lusts of gluttony and drunkenness. 'He commands their time;' when God calls to duty, to pray, to hear, no time all the week to be spared for that; but if the sinner hears there is a merry meeting, a knot of good fellows at the ale-house, all is thrown aside to wait on his lord and master; calling left at sixes and sevens, yea, wife and children crying, it may be starving, while the wretch is pouring out their very blood, in wasting their livelihood, at the foot of his lust. The sinner is in the 'bond of iniquity;' and being bound, he must obey. He is said to go after his lusts, 'as the fool to the stocks,' Prov. vii. 22. The pinioned malefactor can as soon untie his own arms and legs, and so run from his keeper, as he from his lusts. 'They are servants,' and their members instruments of sin; even as the workman takes up his axe, and it resists not; so doth Satan dispose of them, except God saith nay.

See here the deplorable condition of every one in a state of sin. He is under the rule of Satan, and government of hell. What tongue can utter, what heart can conceive the misery of this state! It was a dismal day which Christ

Digitized by Google

foretold, Matt. xxiv., when the abomination of desolation should be seen, standing in the holy place: 'Then,' saith Christ, 'let him that is in Judea flee into the mountains.' But what was that to this? They are but men, though abominable; these devils. They did but stand in the material temple, and defile and deface that; but these display their banners in the souls of men, pollute that throne, which is more glorious than the material heaven itself, made for God alone to sit in. They exercised their cruelties at furthest on the bodies of men, killing and torturing them: here the precious souls of men are destroyed. When David would curse to purpose the enemies of God, he prays that 'Satan may be at their right hand.' It is strange sinners should no more tremble at this, who, should they but see their swine or a beast, bewitched and possessed of the devil, run headlong into the sea, would cry out as half undone. And is not one soul worth more than all these? What a plague is it to have Satan possess thy heart and spirit, hurrying thee in the fury of thy lusts to perdition? O poor man! what a sad change hast thou made? Thou who wouldst not sit under the meek and peaceable government of God thy rightful Lord, art paid for thy rebellion against him, in the cruelty of this tyrant, who writes all his laws in the blood of his subjects; and why will you sit any longer, O sinners, under the shadow of this bramble, from which you can expect nothing but eternal fire to come at last and devour you? Behold, Christ is in the field, sent of God to recover his right and your liberty. His royal standard is pitched in the gospel, and proclamation made, that if any poor sinners, weary of the devil's government, and heavy laden with the miserable chains of his spiritual bondage, so as these irons of his sins enter into his very soul, to afflict it with the sense of them, shall thus come and repair to Christ; he shall have protection from God's justice, the devil's wrath, and sin's dominion; in a word, 'he shall have rest,' and that 'glorious,' Matt. xi. 28; Isa. xi. 10. Usually, when a people have been ground with the oppression of some bloody tyrant, they are apt enough to long for a change, and to listen to any overture that gives them hope of liberty, though reached by the hand of a stranger, who may prove as bad as the other; yet bondage is so grievous, that people desire to change, as sick men their beds, though they find little ease thereby. Why then should deliverance be unwelcome to you, sinners? Deliverance brought not by a stranger whom you need fear what his design is upon you, but your near kinsman in blood, who cannot mean you ill, but he must first hate his own flesh? and whoever did that? To be sure, not he, who though he took part of our flesh, that he might have the right of being our Redeemer, yet would have no kindred with us in the sinfulness of our nature, Heb. ii. 14, 15. And it is sin that makes us cruel, yea, to our own flesh. What can you expect from him but pure mercy, who is himself pure? They are 'the mercies of the wicked which are cruel,' Heb. iv. 15. Believe it, Christ counts it his honour, that he is King of a willing people, and not of slaves. He comes to make you free, not to bring you into bondage; to make you kings, not vassals. None give Christ an evil word, but those who never were his subjects. Inquire but of those who have tried both Satan's service and Christ's: they are best able to resolve you what they are. You see when a soul comes over from Satan's quarters unto Christ's, and has but once the experience of that sweetness which is in his service, there is no getting him back to his old drudgery, as they say of those who come out of the north, which is cold and poor, they like the warm south so well, that they seldom go back more. What more dreadful to a gracious soul than to be delivered into the hands of Satan, or fall under the power of his lusts? It would choose rather to leap into a burning furnace, than be commanded by them. This is the great request a child of God makes, that he would rather whip him in his house, than turn him out of it to become a prey to Satan. O sinners, did you know, which you cannot till you come over to Christ, and embrace him as your Lord and Saviour, what the privileges of Christ's servants are, and what gentle usage saints have at Christ's hands, you would say those were the only happy men in the world which stand continually before him. His laws are written, not with his subjects' blood, as Satan's are, but with his own. All his commands are acts of grace; it is a favour to be employed about them. To you it is given to believe, yea, to 'suffer,' Phil. i. 29. Such an honour the saints esteem it to do

Digitized by Google

anything he commands, that they count God rewards them for one piece of service, if he enables them for another. 'This I had,' saith David, 'because I kept thy precepts,' Psalm cxix. 56. What was the great reward he got? see ver. 55: 'I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and kept thy law;' then follows, 'This I had:' he got more strength and skill to keep the law for the future, by his obedience past; and was he not well paid, think you, for his pains? There is fruit even in holiness, the Christian hath in hand, which he eats while he is at work, that may stay his stomach until the full reward comes, which is 'eternal life,' Rom. vi. 22. Jesus Christ is a Prince that loves to see his people thrive, and grow rich under his government. This is he whom sinners are so much afraid of, that when he sets open their prison, and bids them come forth, they choose rather to bore their ears to the devil's post, than enjoy this blessed liberty. It is no wonder that some of the saints have indeed, 'when tortured, not accepted deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection,' Heb. xi. 53. But what a riddle is this, that forlorn souls, bound with the chain of their lusts, and the irresistible decree of God for their damnation if they believe not on the Lord Jesus, should, as they are driving to execution, refuse deliverance! This may set heaven and earth a wondering. Surely, dying in their sins, they cannot hope to have a better resurrection than they have a death. I am afraid rather, that they do not firmly believe that they shall have any resurrection; and then no wonder they make so light of Christ's offer, who think themselves safe when once earthed in this burrow of the grave. But let sinners know, it is not the grave can hold them, when the day of assizes comes, and the Judge calls for the prisoners to the bar. The grave was never intended to be a sanctuary to defend sinners from the hand of justice, but a close prison to secure them against the day of trial, that they may be forthcoming. Then sinners shall be digged out of their burrows, and dragged out of their holes to answer their contempt of Christ and his grace. O how will you be astonished to see him become your judge, whom you now refuse to be your king! to hear that gospel witness against you for your damnation, which at the same time shall acquit others for their salvation! What think you to do, sinners, in that day? Will thou cry and scream for mercy at Christ's hand? Alas! when the sentence is passed, thy face will immediately be covered: condemned prisoners are not allowed to speak: tears then are unprofitable, when no place left for repentence either in Christ's heart or thine own. Or meanest thou to apply thyself to thy old lord, in whose service thou hast undone thy soul, and cry to him, as she to Ahab, 'Help, O king:' alas! thine eye shall see him in the same condemnation with thyself. Hadst thou not better now renounce the devil's rule, whilst thou mayest be received into Christ's government? pour out thy tears and cries now for mercy and grace when they are to be had, than to save them for another world to no purpose.

Quest. But possibly thou wilt say, 'How may I, that am a home-born slave to sin, yea, who have lived so many years under his cursed rule, get out of his dominion and power, and be translated into the kingdom of Christ?'

Answ. The difficulty of this great work lies not in prevailing with Christ to receive thee for his subject, who refuseth none that in truth of heart desire to come under his shadow. It doth not stand with his design to reject any such. Do physicians use to chide their patients away, lawyers their clients, or generals discourage those who fall off from the enemy, and come to their side? Surely not. When David was in the field, it is said, 1 Sam. xxii. 2, 'Every one that was in distress, in debt, or discontented, gathered themselves to him, and he became a captain over them.' And so will Christ be to every one that is truly discontented with Satan's government, and upon an inward dislike thereof repairs to him. But the main business will be to take thee off from thy engagements to thy lusts and Satan, till which be done, Christ will not own thee as a subject, but look on thee as a spy. It fares with sinners as with servants. There may be fallings out between them and their masters, and high words pass between them, that you would think they would take up their pack and be gone in all haste; but the fray is soon over, and by next morning all is forgot, and the servants are as hard at their work as ever. O how oft are sinners taking their leave of their lusts, and giving warning to their old masters;

Digitized by Google

they will repent and reform, and what not! but in few days they have repented of their repentance, and deformed their reformings, which shews they were drunk with some passion, when they thought or spake this; and no wonder they reverse all when they come to their true temper. Now, because Satan has many policies, by which he useth to keep his hold of sinners, I shall discover some of them, which if thou canst withstand, it will be no hard matter to bring thee out of his power and rule.

First, Satan doth his utmost, that sinners may not have any serious thoughts of the miserable state they are in, while under his rule; or hear anything from others, which might the least unsettle their minds from his service. Consideration, he knows, is the first step to repentance: he that doth not consider his ways, what they are, and whither they lead him, is not like to change them in haste. Israel stirred not, till Moses came, and had some discourse with them about their woful slavery, and the gracious thoughts of God towards them; and then they begin to desire to be gone. Pharaoh soon bethought him what consequence might follow upon this, and cunningly labours to prevent by doubling their task: 'Ye are idle, ye are idle, therefore ye say, Let us go, and do sacrifice to the Lord. Go therefore and work,' Exod. v. 17, 18. As if he had said, Have you so much spare time to think of gadding into the wilderness, and have you your seditious conventicles, Moses and you, to lay your plots together? I will break the knot; give them more work, scatter them all over the land to gather straw, that they may not meet to entice one another's hearts from my service. Thus Satan is very jealous of the sinner, afraid every Christian that speaks to him, or ordinance he hears, should inveigle him. By his good-will he should come at neither; no, nor have a thought of heaven or hell from one end of the week to the other; and that he may have as few as may be, he keeps them full-handed with work. The sinner grinds, and he is filling the hopper, that the mill may not stand still. He is with the sinner as soon as he wakes, and fills his wretched heart with some wicked thoughts, which as a morning draught may keep him from the infection of any savour of good, that may be breathed on him by others in the day-time. All the day long he watcheth him, as the master would do his man that he fears will run away. And at night, like a careful jailor, he locks him up again in his chamber with more bolts and fetters upon him, not suffering him to sleep as he lies on his bed, 'till he hath done some mischief,' Luke xv. Ah! poor wretch! was ever slave so looked to? As long as the devil can keep thee thus, thou art his own, sure enough. The prodigal 'came to himself,' before he came to his father. He considered with himself what a starving condition he was in; his husks were poor meat, and yet he had not enough of them neither; and how easily he might mend his commons, if he had but grace to go home, and humble himself to his father. Now, and not till now, he goes. Resolve thus, poor sinner, to sit down and consider what thy state is, and what it might be, if thou wouldst but change the bondage of Satan for the sweet government of Jesus Christ. First, Ask thy soul whether the devil can, after thou hast worn out thy miserable life here in his drudgery, prefer thee to a happy state in the other world, or so much as secure thee from a state of torment and woe? If he cannot, whether there be not one Jesus Christ, who is able and willing to do it? and if so, whether it be not extreme cruelty to thy precious soul, to stay any longer under the shadow of this bramble, when thou mayest make so blessed a change? A few of these thoughts abidingly laid home to thy soul may, God striking in with them, shake the foundations of the devil's prison, and make thee haste as fast from him as one out of a house on fire about his ears.

Secondly, Satan hath his instruments to oppose the messengers and overtures which God sends by them to bring the sinner out of Satan's rule. When Moses comes to deliver Israel out of the Egyptian bondage, up starts Jannes and Jambres to resist him. When Paul preacheth to the Deputy, the devil hath his chaplain at court to hinder him; Elymas, one that was 'full of all subtilty and mischief.' Some or other, to be sure, he will find, when God is parlying with a sinner, and persuading him to come over to Christ, that shall labour to clog the work. Either carnal friends, these he sends to plead his cause, or old companions in wickedness, these bestir them, one while labouring

Digitized by Google

to jeer him out of his new way; or if that take not, by turning their old love into bitter wrath against him for playing the apostate, and leaving him so. Or if yet he will not be stopped in his way, then he hath his daubing preachers, still like Job's messengers, the last the worst, who with their soul flattering or rather murdering doctrine shall go about to heal his wound slightly. Now as ever you desire to get out of Satan's bondage, have a care of all these: harden thyself against the entreaties of carnal friends and relations; resolve that if thy children should hang about thy knees to keep thee from Christ, thou wilt throw them away; if thy father and mother should lie prostrate at thy foot, rather than not go to Christ, to go over their very backs to him. Never can we part with their love upon such advantageous terms as these. And for thy brethren in iniquity I hope thou dost not mean to stay until thou hast their good will, then even ask the devil's also. Heaven is but little worth if thou hast not a heart to despise a little shame, and bear a few taunts from profane Ishmaels for thy hopes of it. Let them spit on thy face, Christ will wipe it off; let them laugh, so thou winnest. If they follow not thy example before they die, the shame will be their own; God himself shall spit it on their face before men and angels, and then kick them into hell. And lastly, escape but the snare of those flatterers, who use their tongues only to lick sinners' consciences whole with their *placentias*, soothing doctrine, and thou art fair for a Christ: ask not counsel of them; they may go about to give you ease, but all those stitches with which they sew up thy wounds, must be ripped open, or thou diest for it.

Thirdly, Satan labours to put off the sinner with delays. Floating, flitting thoughts of repenting he fears not; he can give sinners leave to talk what they will do, so he can beg time, and by his art keep such thoughts from coming to a head, and ripening into a perfect resolution; few are in hell but thought of repenting; but Satan so handled the matter, that they could never pitch upon the time in earnest when to do it. If ever thou meanest to get out of his clutches, fly out of his doors, and run for thy life; wherever this warning finds thee, stay not, though in the midst of thy joys, with which thy lusts entertain thee: as the paper which came to Brentius, from that senator his dear friend, took him at supper with his wife and children, and bade him flee, *cito, citius, citissime;* which he did, leaving his dear company and sweet cheer; so do thou, or else thou mayest repent thy stay when it is too late. A vision charged the 'wise men' to go back another way, and not so much as see Herod, though he had charged them otherwise. O go not back, drunkard, to thy good fellows; adulterer, to thy queans; covetous wretch, to thy usury and unlawful gain: turn another way, and gratify not the devil a moment. The command saith, Now repent. The imperative hath no future tense. God saith, 'To-day, while it is to-day:' the devil saith, To-morrow. Which wilt thou obey, God or him? Thou sayest thou meanest at last to do it; then why not now? Wilt thou stand with God for a day or two, huckle with him for a penny? Heaven is not such a hard pennyworth, but thou mayest come up to his terms. And which is the morrow thou meanest? thou hast but a day in thy life, for aught thou knowest; where then canst thou find a morrow for repentance? But shouldst thou have as many days to come as Methuselah lived, yet know, sin is hereditary, and such sort of diseases grow more upon us with our years. It is with long-accustomed sinners, as with those who have sat long under a government, they rather like to be as they are, though but ill off, than think of a change; or like those who in a journey have gone out of the way all the day, will rather take any new way, over hedge or ditch, than think of going so far back to be set right.

Fourthly, Satan labours to compromise the business, and bring it to a composition between him and Christ: when conscience will not be pacified, then Satan, for quiet's sake, will yield to something, as Pharaoh with Moses; after much ado he is willing they should go: Exod. viii. 28, 'And Pharaoh said, I will let you go, that you may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness.' But then comes in this caution, 'Only you shall not go very far away.' Thus Satan will yield, the sinner may pray, and hear the word, and make a goodly

Digitized by Google

profession, so he doth not go very far, but that he may have him again at night. If God hath the matins, he looks for the vigils, and thus he is content the day should be divided. Doth conscience press a reformation and change of the sinner's course, rather than fail, he will grant that also: yet as Pharaoh when he yielded they should go, he meant 'their little ones should stay behind as a pledge for those that went,' Exod. x. 11; so Satan must have some one sin that must be spared, and no matter though it be a little one. Now, if ever you would get out of the devil's rule, make no composition with him. Christ will be king or no king. Not a hoof must be left behind, or anything which may make an errand for thee afterwards to return. Take therefore thy everlasting farewell of every sin, as to the sincere and fixed purpose of thy heart, or thou doest nothing. Paul joins his faith and his purpose together, 2 Tim. iii. 10, not the one without the other. At the promulgation of the law in Sinai, God did, as it were, give Israel the oath of allegiance to him, then he told them what law he would rule them by, and they gave their consent: this was the 'espousal' which God puts them in mind of, Jer. ii., in which they were solemnly married together, as king and subjects. Now, mark, before God would do this, he will have them out of Egypt. They could not obey his laws, and Pharaoh's idolatrous customs also, and therefore he will have them out before he solemnly espouseth them to be a nation peculiarly his. Thou must be a widow before Christ marry thee; he will not lie by the side of another's wife. O that it were come to this! then the match would soon be made between Christ and thee. Let me ask thee, poor soul, hast thou seriously considered who Christ is, and what his sweet government is? And couldst thou find in thy heart, out of an inward abhorrency of sin and Satan, and a liking to Christ, to renounce sin and Satan and choose Christ for thy Lord? Doth thy soul say as Rebecca, 'I will go,' if I could tell how to get to him. But, alas! I am here a poor prisoner, I cannot shake off my fetters, and set myself at liberty to come unto Christ? Well, poor soul, canst thou groan heartily under thy bondage? Then for thy comfort know, thy deliverance is at the door; He that heard the cry of Israel in Egypt will hear thine also, yea, come and save thee out of the hands of thy lusts. He will not, as some, who entangle thy affections by making love to thee, and then give over the suit, and come to thee no more. If Christ has won thy heart, he will be true for thee, and be at all the cost to bring thee out of thy prison-house also; yea, to take the pains to come to thee himself, and bring with him those wedding garments in which he will carry thee from thy prison to his Father's house with joy, where thou shalt live not only as a subject under his law, but as a bride in the bosom of his love. And what can be added to thy happiness more, when thy Prince is thy husband, and that such a prince to whom all other are vassals, even the prince of the world himself? and yet so gracious, that his majesty hinders not his familiar converse with thee, a poor creature, but adds to the condescent thereof; therefore God chooseth to mix names of greatness and relation together: the one to sweeten the other: 'Thy Maker is thy husband, thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called,' Isa. liv. 5; and to usher in those promises with titles of greatest dread and terror to the creature, that hold forth the greatest condescensions of love. How can God stoop lower than to come and dwell with a poor humble soul, which is more than if he had said, such a one should dwell with him? For a beggar to live at court, is not so much as the king to dwell with him in his cottage. Yet this promise is ushered in with the most magnificent titles: 'Thus saith the High and Lofty One, that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,' Isa. lvii. 15. And why such titles but to take away the fears which his saints are prone to take up from them. Will the High and Lofty One, saith the humble soul, look on me, a poor worm? Will the holy God come near such an unclean creature? saith the contrite one. Isaiah himself cried he was undone at the sight of God, and this attribute proclaimed before him, Isa. vi. 5. Now God prefixeth these, that the creature may know his majesty and holiness, which seem so terrible to us, are no prejudice to his love; yea, so gracious a prince is thy husband, that he delights rather

Digitized by Google

his saints should call him by the names of love, than state. 'Thou shalt call me Ishi, and shall no more call me Baali,' Hos. ii. 16. That is, my husband not my lord.

SECTION IV.—*Doct.* The second point follows. Ignorance above other sins enslaves a soul to Satan; a knowing man may be his slave but an ignorant one can be no other. Knowledge doth not make the heart good, but it is impossible that without knowledge it should be good. There are some sins which an ignorant person cannot commit, there are more which he cannot but commit: knowledge is the key, Luke xi. 52, Christ the door, John x. Christ opens heaven, knowledge opens Christ. In three particulars the point will appear more fully.

First, Ignorance opens a door for sin to enter.

Secondly, As ignorance lets sin in, so it locks it up in the soul, and the soul in it.

Thirdly, As it locks it up, so it shuts all means of help out.

First, Ignorance opens the door for Satan to enter in with his troops of lusts; where the watch is blind, the city is soon taken: an ignorant man sins, and, like drunken Lot, he knows not when the tempter comes, nor when he goes: he is like a man that walks in his sleep, knows not where he is, nor what he does. 'Father, forgive them,' saith Christ, 'they know not what they do.' The apostle, 1 Cor. xv., having reported the sensuality of some, ver. 32, who made the consideration of death, by which others are awed from sin, a provocative to sin, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die,' he gives an account of this absurd reasoning: 'All have not the knowledge of God.' An ignorant person is a man in shape, and a beast in heart. 'There is no knowledge in the land,' saith the prophet Hosea, chap. iv. 1; and see what a regiment follows this blind captain, swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and what not? We read, 2 Tim. iii. 5, of some 'laden with sin:' here are trees full of bitter fruit, and what dung shall we find at the root that makes them so fruitful but Ignorance? 'silly women,' and such 'who never come to the knowledge of the truth.'

Secondly, Ignorance, as it lets sin in, so it locks it up, and the soul in it; such a one lies in Satan's inner dungeon, where no light of conviction comes, darkness inclines to sleep, a blind mind and drowsy conscience go together. When the storm arose, the mariners who were awake fell a praying to their God; but the sleeper fears nothing. Ignorance lays the soul asleep under the hatches of stupidity. God hath planted in the beast a natural fear of that which threatens to hurt it. Go to thrust a beast into a pit, and it hangs back, nature shews its abhorrency. Man being of a nobler nature, and subject to more dangers, God hath set a double guard on him, as a natural fear of danger, so a natural shame that covers the face at the doing of any unworthy action. Now an ignorant man hath slipped from both these his keepers; he sins and blusheth not, because he knows not his guilt; he wants that magistrate within, who should put him to shame; neither is he afraid, because he knows not his danger: therefore he plays with his sin, as the child with the waves, that by and by will swallow him up. Conscience is God's alarm to call the sinner up; it doth not always ring in his ear that hath knowledge, being usually set by God to go off at some special hour; when God is speaking in an ordinance, or striking in a providence; but in an ignorant soul this is silent. The clock cannot go when the weights are taken off; conscience is only a witness to what it knows.

Thirdly, Ignorance shuts out the means of recovery. Friends and ministers, yea, Christ himself stands without, and cannot help the creature, as such threatenings and promises are of no use; he fears not the one, he desires not the other, because he knows neither: heaven-way cannot be found in the dark, and therefore the first thing God is to spring in with a light, and let the creature know where he is, and what the way is to get out of his prison-house, without which all attempts to escape are in vain. There is some glimmering light in all. *Non dantur puræ tenebræ*, I think, is good divinity as well as philosophy: and this night-light may discover many sins, produce inward prickings of conscience for them; yea, stir up the creature to step aside, rather than drown in such broad waters. There are some sins so cruel and costly, that the most prostrate soul may in time be weary of their service for low ends: but what will

Digitized by Google

all this come to, if the creature be not acquainted with Christ the true way to God, faith and repentance the only way to Christ? Such a one, after all this bustle, instead of making an escape from Satan, will run full into his mouth another way. There are some ways which at first seem right to the traveller; yet wind about so insensibly, that when a man hath gone far, and thinks himself near home, he is carried back to the place from whence he set forth. This will befal every soul ignorant of Christ, and the way of life through him; after many years' travel, as they think, towards heaven by their good meanings, blind devotions, and reformation, when they shall expect to be within sight of heaven, they shall find themselves even where they were at first, as much the slaves of Satan as ever.

Use 1. This speaks to you that are parents. See what need you have of instructing your children, and training them up betimes in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Till these chains of darkness be knocked off their minds, there is no possibility of getting them out of the devil's prison; he hath no such tame slave as the ignorant soul: such a one goes before Satan, as the silly sheep before the butcher, and knows not who he is, nor whither he carries him; and can you see the devil driving your children to the shambles, and not labour to rescue them out of his hands? Bloody parents you are, that can thus harden your bowels against your own flesh. Now the more to provoke you to your duty, take these considerations.

1. Your relation obligeth you to take care of their precious souls. It is the soul is the child rather than the body; and therefore in Scripture put for the whole man. Abraham and Lot went forth 'with all the souls they had gotten in Haran,' Gen. xii. So, 'all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt that is, all the persons. The body is but the sheath; and if one should leave his sword with you to be kept safely for him, would you throw away the blade, and only preserve the scabbard? And yet parents do commonly judge of their care and love to their children by providing for the outward man, by their breeding, and teaching them how to live like men, as they say, when they are dead and gone, and comport themselves to their civil place and rank in the world. These things indeed are commendable; but is not the most weighty business of all forgotten in the mean time, while no endeavour is used that they may live as Christians, and know how to carry themselves in duty to God or man as such? And can they do this without the knowledge of the holy rule they are to walk by? I am sure David knew no means effectual without this, and therefore propounds the question, 'Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?' and he resolves it in the next words, 'By taking heed thereto according to thy word,' Psa. cxix. 9. And how shall they compare their way and the word together, if not instructed? Our children are not born with Bibles in their heads or hearts. And who ought to be the instructor, if not the parent? yea, who will do it with such natural affection? As I have heard sometimes a mother say in other respects, Who can take such pains with my child, and be so careful as myself that am its mother? Bloody parents then they are, who acquaint not their children with God or his word; what do they but put them under a necessity of perishing, if God stir not up some to shew more mercy than themselves to them. Is it any wonder to hear that ship to be sunk, or dashed upon the rock, which was put to sea without card or compass? no more is it, they should engulf themselves in sin and perdition, that are thrust forth into the world, which is a sea of temptation, without the knowledge of God, or their duty to him. In the fear of God think of it, parents your children have souls, and these God set you to watch over; it will be a poor account at the last day, if you can only say, Lord, here are my children, I bred them complete gentlemen, left them rich and wealthy. The rust of that silver you left them will witness your folly and sin, that you would do so much for that which rusts, and nothing for the enriching their minds with the knowledge of God, which would have endured for ever; happy if you had left them less money and more knowledge.

2. Consider, it hath ever been the saints' practice to instruct and teach their children the way of God. David we find dropping instruction into his son Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9, 'Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him

Digitized by Google

with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind.' Though a king, he did not put it off to his chaplains, but whetted it on him with his own lips. Neither was his queen Bathsheba forgetful of her duty: her gracious counsel is upon record, Pro. xxxi.; and that she may do it with the more seriousness and solemnity, we find her stirring up her motherly bowels, to let her son see that she fetched her words deep, even from her heart: 'What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?' ver. 2. Indeed, that counsel is most like to go to the heart, which comes from thence. Parents know not what impression such melting expressions of their love, mingled with their instructions, leave on their children. God bids 'draw forth our souls to the hungry;' that is more than draw our purse, which may be done, and the heart hard and churlish. Thus we should draw forth our souls with our instructions. What need I tell of Timothy's mother and grandmother, who acquainted him with the Scripture from his youth? And truly, I think, that man calls in question his own saintship, that takes no care to acquaint his child with God, and the way that leads to him. I have known some, that though profane themselves, have been very solicitous their children should have good education; but never knew I a saint that was regardless whether his child knew God or not.

3. It is an act of great unrighteousness not to instruct our children. We read of some 'that hold the truth in unrighteousness;' among others, those parents do it, that lock up the knowledge of these saving truths from their children, which God hath imparted to themselves. There is a double unrighteousness in it.

First, They are unrighteous to their children, who may lay as much claim to their care of instructing them, as to their labour and industry in laying up a temporal estate for them. If he should do unrighteously with his child, that should not endeavour to provide for his outward maintenance; or, having gathered an estate, should lock it up, and deny his child necessaries; then much more he that lives in ignorance of God, whereby he renders himself incapable of providing for his child's soul; but most of all, he that having gathered a stock of knowledge, yet hides it from his child.

Secondly, They are unrighteous to God.

First, In that they keep that talent in heir own hands which was given to be paid out to their children. When God revealed himself to Abraham he had respect to Abraham's children; and therefore we find God promising himself this at Abraham's hand's, upon which he imparts his mind to him, concerning his purpose of destroying Sodom: 'Shall I hide from Abraham,' saith God, 'that thing which I do? I know that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, Gen. xviii. 17, 19. The church began at first in a family, and was preserved by the godly care of parents in instructing their children and household in the truths of God whereby the knowledge of God was transmitted from generation to generation and though now the church is not confined to such strait limits, yet every private family is as a little nursery to the church; if the nursery be not carefully planted, the orchard will soon decay. O, could you be willing, christians, that your children, when you are laid in the dust, should be turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine, and prove a generation that do not know God? Atheism needs not be planted; you do enough to make your children such, if you do not endeavour to plant religion in their minds. The very neglect of the gardener to sow and dress his garden, gives advantage enough to the weeds to come up. This is the difference between religion and atheism; religion doth not grow without planting, but will die even where it is planted, without watering: atheism, irreligion, and profaneness, are weeds will grow without setting; but they will not die without plucking up; all care and means little enough to stub them up. And, therefore, you that are parents, and do not teach your children, deal the more unrighteously with God, because you neglect the best season in their whole life for planting in them the knowledge of God, and plucking up the contrary weeds of atheism and irreligion. Young weeds come up with most ease: sinful ignorance in youth becomes wilful ignorance; yea, impudence in age; you will not instruct them when young, and they will scorn their ministers when they are old.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, You deal unrighteously with God, that train not up your children in the knowledge of God, because your children, if you be Christian parents, are God's children; they stand in a federal relation to him, which the children of others do not; and shall God's children be nurtured with the devil's education? Ignorance is that which he blinds the minds of the children of disobedience withal. Shall God's children have no better breeding? The children of a Jew God made account were born to him: 'Thy sons and daughters whom thou hast borne to me,' Ezek. xvi. 20. God had, by the covenant which he made with that people, married them unto himself; and, therefore, as the wife bears her children to her husband, they are his children, so God calls the children of the Jew his, and complains of it as an horrible wickedness in them, that they should not bring them up as his, but offer them up to Moloch: 'They have slain my children,' saith God, ver. 21. And are not the children of a Christian his children, as well as the Jews were? Hath God recalled or altered the first covenant, and cut off the entail? and darest thou slay not only thy children, but the Lord's also? and is not ignorance that bloody knife that doth it? 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,' Hos. iv. 6. Do you not tremble to offer them, not to Moloch, but the devil, whom before you had given up to God, when you brought them to that solemn ordinance of baptism, and there desired, before God and man, that they might become covenant-servants to the Lord? And hast thou bound them to him, and never teach them, either who their Lord and Master is, or what their duty is as his servants? Out of thy own mouth will God condemn thee.

4. Consider you, who are parents, that by not instructing your children, you entitle yourselves to all the sins they shall commit to their death. We may sin by a proxy, and make another's fact our own. 'Thou hast,' saith God by Nathan to David, concerning Uriah, 'slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon,' 2 Sam. xii. 9. So thou mayest pierce Christ, and slay him over and over with the bloody sword of thy wicked children, if thou art not the more careful to train them up in the fear of God. There might be something said for that heathen, who, when the scholar abused him, fell upon the master and struck him: indeed it is possible he might be in the most fault. When the child breaks the sabbath, it is his sin; but more the father's if he never taught him what the command of God was. And if the parent be accessary to the sin of the child, it will be hard for him to escape a partnership, yea a precedency in the punishment. O what a sad greeting will such have of their children at the great day. Will they not then accuse you to be the murderers of their precious souls, and lay their blood at your door, cursing you to your face, that taught them no better? But grant, that by the interposition of thy timely repentance, thou securest thy soul from the judgment of that day, yet God can scourge thee here for the neglect of thy duty to them. How oft do we see children become heavy crosses to such parents! It is just that they should not know their duty to thee who didst not teach them their duty to God; or if thou shouldst not live so long as to see this, yet sure thou canst not but go in sorrow to thy grave, to leave children behind thee that are on their way to hell Some think that Lot's lingering so long in Sodom, was his lothness to leave his sons-in-law behind him, to perish in the flames. No doubt, good man, it was very grievous to him, and this might make him stay pleading with them, till the angel pulled him away. And certainly nothing makes holy parents more loth to be gone out of the reach of that fire, before they go, that God will rain upon the heads of sinners. You know not how soon the messengers may come to pluck you hence; do your best while you are among them to win them home to God.

Use 2. To the ministers of the gospel. Let this stir up your bowels of compassion towards those many ignorant souls, in your respective congregations, who know not the right hand from the left. This, this is the great destroyer of the country, which ministers should come forth against with all their care and strength. More are swept to hell with this plague of spiritual darkness than any other. Where the light of knowledge and conviction is, there commonly is a sense and pain that accompanies the sinner when he doth evil, which forceth some now and then to inquire for a physician, and come in the distress of their

Digitized by Google

spirits to their ministers or others for the counsel; but the ignorant soul feels no smart. If the minister stay till he sends for him to instruct him, he may sooner hear the bell go for him, than any messenger come for him; you must seek them out, and not expect that they will come to you. These are a sort of people that are afraid more of their remedy than their disease, and study more to hide their ignorance, than how they may have it cured; which should make us pity them the more, because they can pity themselves so little. I confess, it is no small unhappiness to some of us, who have to do with a multitude, that we have neither time nor strength to make our address to every particular person in our congregations, and attend on them as their needs require, and yet cannot well satisfy our consciences otherwise. But let us look to it, that though we cannot do to the height of what we would, we be not found wanting in what we may. Let not the difficulty of our province make us like some, who, when they see they have more work upon their hands than they can well dispatch, grow sick of it, and sit down out of a lazy despondency, and do just nothing. He that hath a great house running to ruin, and but a small purse, it is better for him to repair now a little, and then a little, then let all fall down, because he cannot do it all at once. Many ministers may complain of their predecessors, that they left them their people more out of repair than their houses, and this makes the work great indeed. As the Jews, who were to revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish before they could build the wall, yet it went up, because 'the people had a mind to work,' Neh. iv. O, if once our hearts were but filled with zeal for God, and compassion to our people's souls, we would up and be doing, though we could but lay a brick a day, and God would be with us. May be you who find a people rude and sottishly ignorant, like stones in the quarry, and trees unfelled, shall not bring the work to such perfection in your days as you desire; yet, as David did for Solomon, thou mayest, by thy pains in teaching and instructing them, prepare materials for another who shall rear the temple. It is very ordinary for one minister to enter into the labours of another, to reap those by a work of conversion, in whom a former minister hath cast the seed of knowledge and conviction; and when God comes to reckon with his workmen, the ploughman and the sower shall have his penny, as well as the harvest man and reaper. O it is a blessed thing to be, as Job saith he was, eyes to the blind, much more to blind souls; such are the ministers whom God himself calls 'pastors after his own heart, that feed his people with knowledge and understanding,' Jer. iii. 15. But woe to those that are accessory to their people's ignorance! Now a minister may be accessory to the ignorance of his people.

First, By his own ignorance. Knowledge is so fundamental to the work and calling of a minister, that he cannot be one without it: 'Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me; seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children,' Hos. iv. 6. The want of knowledge in a minister is such a defect as cannot be supplied by anything else; be he never so meek, patient, bountiful, unblamable, if he hath not skill to divide the word aright, he is not cut out for a minister. Everything is good, as it is good for the end it is appointed to; a knife, though it had a shaft of diamonds, yet it will not cut, it is no knife. A bell, if not sound, is no bell. The great work of a minister is to teach others; his lips are to preserve knowledge; he should be as conversant in the things of God, as others in their particular trades. Ministers are called lights: if the light then be darkness, how great is the darkness of that people like to be! I know these stars in Christ's hands are not all of the same magnitude; there is a greater glory of gifts and graces shines in some than others; yet so much light is necessary to every minister, as was in the star the wise men saw at Christ's birth, to be able, out of the word, to direct sinners the safe and true way to Christ and salvation. O sirs; it is a sad way of getting a living by killing of men, as some unskilful physicians do; but much more to get a temporal livelihood by ruining souls through our ignorance. He is a cruel man to the poor passengers, who will undertake to be pilot, when he never so much as learned his compass.

Secondly, By his negligence. It is all one if the nurse hath no milk in her

Digitized by Google

breasts, or having, draws it forth to her child. There is a woe to the idol-shepherd, Zech. xi.; such as have mouths, but speak not; lips, but not to feed the people with knowledge. It shall be the people's sin, if they feed not when bread is before them; but woe to us if we give them not meat in due season. O Sirs, what shall we say to our Lord that trusts us, if those abilities which he hath given us as market-money, to buy bread for our people, be found wrapped up in a napkin of sloth? If that time, wherein we should have been teaching and instructing them, shall appear to be wasted in our pleasures, or employed about our carnal profits? That servant shall have but a sad welcome of his master when he comes home, that shall be found out of the way with the key, and the family starving in the meantime for want of provision.

Thirdly, By his unedifying preaching, when he preacheth unsound doctrine, which doth not perfect the understanding, but corrupt it. Better he did leave them in simple ignorance, than colour their minds with a false dye, or when that he preacheth is frothy and flashy; no more fit to feed their souls, than husks the prodigal's belly, which, when they know, they are little wiser for their soul's good. Or when his discourses are so high flown that the poor people stand gazing, as those who have lost the sight of their preacher, and at the end of the sermon cannot tell what he would have. Or those who preach only truths that are for the higher forms of professors, who have their senses well exercised, excellent may be for the building of three or four eminent saints in the congregation; but in the meantime, the weak ones in the family, who should indeed be chiefly thought on, because least able to guide themselves, or carve for themselves—these are forgotten. He sure is an unwise builder, that makes a scaffold as high as Paul's steeple, when his work is at the bottom, and he is to lay the foundation, whereas the scaffold should rise as the building goes up. So Paul advanceth in his doctrine, as his hearers do in knowledge: Heb. vi. 1, 'Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.' 'Let us.' It is well indeed when the people can keep pace with the preacher. To preach truths and notions above the hearers' capacity, is like a nurse that should go to feed a child with a spoon too big to go into its mouth. We may, by such preaching, please ourselves, some of higher attainments; but what shall poor ignorant ones do in the meantime? He is the faithful steward that considers both. The preacher is, as Paul saith of himself, 'a debtor both to the Greek and to the barbarian, to the wise and to the unwise,' Rom. i. 14, to prepare truths suitable to the degree of his hearers. Let the wise have their portion, but let them be patient to see the weaker in the family served also.

Fourthly, A minister may be accessory to the ignorance of his people, when through the scandal of his life he prejudiceth his doctrine, as a cook, who by his nastiness makes others afraid to eat what comes out of his foul fingers; or when through his supercilious carriage his poor people dare not come to him. He that will do any good in the minister's calling, must be as careful as the fisher that he doth nothing to scare souls away from him, but all to allure and invite, that they may be drawn within the compass of his net.

Use 3. Is the ignorant soul such a slave to Satan? Let this stir you up that are ignorant, from your seats of cloth, whereon, like the blind Egyptian, you sit in darkness; speedily come out of this darkness, and resolve not to go down to utter darkness. The covering of Haman's face did tell him that he should not stay in the king's presence. If thou livest in ignorance, it shews thou art in God's black bill; he puts this cover before thine eyes in wrath, whom he means to turn off into hell: 2 Cor. iv., 'If our gospel be hid, it is to those that perish.' In one place sinners are threatened, 'they shall die without knowledge,' Job xxxvi. In another place, 'they shall die in their sins,' John viii. He indeed that dies without knowledge, dies in his sins; and what more fearful doom can the great God pass upon a creature than this; better die in a prison, die in a ditch, than die in our sins. If thou die in thy sins, thou shalt rise in thy sins: as thou fallest asleep in the dust, so thou awakest in the morning of the resurrection; if an ignorant, Christless wretch, as such thou shalt be arraigned and judged. That God whom now sinners bid depart from them, will then be worth their acquaintance, themselves being judges; but,

Digitized by Google

alas! then he will throw their own words in their teeth, and bid them depart from him, he desires not the knowledge of them. O sinners, you shall see, at last, God can better be without your company in heaven, than you could without his knowledge on earth: yet, yet it is day, draw your curtains, and behold Christ shining upon your face with gospel-light; hear wisdom crying in the streets, and Christ piping under your window in the voice of his Spirit and messengers, 'How long will ye simple ones love simplicity, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, and make known my words unto you,' Prov. i. 21—23. What can you say, sinners, for your sottish ignorance? Where is your cloak for this sin? The time hath been when the word of the Lord was precious, and there was no open vision, not a Bible to be found in a town or country; when the tree of knowledge was forbidden fruit, and none might taste thereof without license from the Pope! happy he that could get a leaf or two of the Testament into a corner, afraid to tell the wife of his bosom! O how sweet were these waters, when you were forced to steal them! But you have the word, or may, in your houses; you have those that open it every Sabbath in their assemblies; many of you at least have the offers of your ministers to take any pains with you in private, passionately beseeching you to pity your souls, and receive instruction: yea, it is the lamentation they generally take up, you will not come unto them that you may receive light. How long may a poor minister sit in his study, before any of the ignorant sort will come upon such an errand! Lawyers have their clients, and physicians their patients: these are sought after, and called up at midnight for counsel: but, alas! the soul, which is more worth than raiment and body too, that is neglected, and the minister seldom thought on, till both these be sent away. Perhaps when the physician gives them over for dead, then we must come and close up those eyes with comfort, which were never opened to see Christ in his truth, or be counted cruel, because we will not sprinkle them with this holy water, and anoint them for the kingdom of heaven, though they know not a step of the way that leads to it. Ah, poor wretches! what comfort would you have us speak to those, to whom God himself speaks terror? Is heaven ours to give to whom we please? or is it in our power to alter the laws of the Most High, and save those whom he condemns? Do you not remember the curse that is to fall upon his head, 'that maketh the blind to wander out of the way?' Deut. xxvii. 18. What curse then would be our portion, if we should confirm such blind souls, that are quite out of the way to heaven, encouraging you to go on and expect to reach heaven at last, when God knows your feet stand in those paths that lead to eternal death? No, it is written; we cannot, and God will not reverse it; you may read your very names among those damned souls which Christ comes in flaming fire to take vengeance on, who the apostle tells us are such, 'that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,' 2 Thess. i. 8. And therefore in the fear of God, let us provoke you, of what age or sex, rank or condition soever in the world, to labour for the saving knowledge of God in Christ, 'whom to know is life eternal.' Are ye young? Inquire after God betimes, while your parts are fresh, and memory strong, before the throng of worldly cares divert you, or lusts of youth debauch you. The feet of those lusts which have buried millions of others in perdition, stand ready to carry you the same way, if preventing grace come not and deliver you out of their hands, by seasoning your minds with the knowledge of God. This morning's draught may prevent thy being infected with the ill savours thou mayest receive from the corrupt examples of others. Nay, how long thy stay may be in the world thou knowest not; see whether thou canst not find graves of thy length in the burial place: and if thou shouldest die ignorant of God and his law, what would then become of thee? The small brush, and the old logs, young sinners, and those that are withered with age, meet and burn together. Or if thou shouldest stay a while longer here, may be, because thou wilt not learn now, God will not teach thee then: or if thou shouldest in thy old age get acquaintance with God, yet it is sad to be sowing thy seed when thou shouldest be reaping thy sheaves, learning to know God when thou mightest be comforting thyself from the old acquaintance thou hast enjoyed with him. Are you old and ignorant? Alas,

Digitized by Google

poor creature! your life in the socket, and this candle of the Lord not set up and lighted in your understanding; your body bowing to the dust, and nature tolling the passing bell, as it were, and you, like one going in the dark, know not whither death will lead you or leave you. It is like, the infirmities of age make you wish your bones were even laid at rest in the grave: but if you should die in this condition, your poor souls would even wish they were here again with their old burthens on their backs: aches and diseases of old age are grievous, but damned souls would thank God if he would bless them with such a heaven, as to lie in these pains to escape the torments of the other! O bethink you before you go hence; the less time you have, the more diligence you must use to gain knowledge; we need not be earnest, one would think, to bid the poor prisoner learn his book, that cannot read, when he knows he shall be hanged if he read not his neck-verse. It is not indeed the bare knowing the truths of the gospel saves; but the gross ignorance of them to be sure will damn souls. Are you poor? It is not your poverty is your sin or misery. Were you God's poor, rich in knowledge and faith, you were happy: Eccles. iv. 13, 'Better is a poor and wise child, than a foolish king, who will no more be admonished;' yea, so happy, that did the princes of the world understand themselves aright, they would wish themselves in our clothes, how ragged soever they are, rather than be in their own robes; there are better making for you in heaven, which you shall put on, when their's shall be pulled off to their shame: it will not then trouble you that you were, while in the world, poor; but it will torment them that they were so rich and great, and so poor to God, and beggarly in their souls.

Are you rich? Labour for the knowledge of the Most High. Solomon had more of the world's treasure than a thousand of you have, and yet we find him hard at prayer, wrestling with God for knowledge, 1 Chron. i. 10. All these outward enjoyments are but *vaginæ bonorum*, as afflictions are but *vaginæ malorum*. I am afraid many men think themselves privileged by their worldly greatness from this duty, as if God were bound to save them, because rich. Alas, sirs! there are not so many of you like to come there. I must confess it would make one tremble to think what a small number those among the great ones that shall be saved are summed up into' 'Not many great, not many rich;' why so few saved? Because so few have saving knowledge. O the atheism, the ignorance, the sottish barbarism that is to be found even in those that the world applaud, and even worship, because of their lands and estates, who yet are not able to give any account of their faith! A poor leather-coat Christian will shame and catechise a hundred of them. If heaven were to be purchased with house and lands, then these would carry it away from the poor disciples of Jesus Christ; they have their hundreds and thousands lie by them for a purchase always, but this money is not current in heaven's exchange. 'This is life eternal, to know thee, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.'

Quest. But how may an ignorant soul attain to knowledge?

Ans. First, Be deeply affected with thy ignorance. Some are blind, as Laodicea, and know it not, Rev. iii. 17. As ignorance blinds the mind, so pride is a blind before their ignorance, that they know it not. These have such a high opinion of themselves, that they take it ill any should suspect them as such; these of all men are most out of the way to knowledge; they are too good to learn of man, as they think, and too bad to be taught of God. The gate into Christ's school is low, and these cannot stoop: the Master himself is so humble and lowly, that he will not teach a proud scholar. Therefore first become a fool in thy own eye. A wiser man than thyself hath confessed as much, Prov. xxx. 2, 3: 'I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man; I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.' When thou art come to thyself, to own and blush at the brutish ignorance of thy mind, thou art fit to be admitted into Christ's school. 'If they be ashamed, then shew them the pattern of the house,' Ezek. xliii. 10.

Secondly, Be faithful with that little knowledge thou hast. Art thou convinced this is a sin, and that is a duty? Follow the light close, you know not what this little may grow to? we use to set up our children with a little stock at first, and as they use it, so we add. The kingdom of God comes of small

Digitized by Google

beginnings. God complains of Israel, they were 'brutish in their knowledge,' Jer. x. 14. He doth not say brutish in their ignorance; had they sinned because they did not know better, this would have excused *a tanto;* but they did that which was brutish and unreasonable, as their worshipping graven images, notwithstanding they knew to the contrary. That man shall not excel in knowledge who prostitutes it to sin: Job xxxvi. 12, 'If they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and shall die without knowledge.' A candle pent up close in a dark lantern swails out apace: and so doth light shut up in the conscience, and not suffered to come forth in the conversation. Those heathens that are charged for 'holding the truth in unrighteousness,' Rom. i. 18, the next news you hear of them is, that 'they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened,' ver. 21.

Thirdly, Ply the throne of grace. *Bene orasse est bene studuisse;* he is the best student in divinity, that studies most upon his knees. Knowledge is a divine gift; all light is from heaven. God is the Father of light, and prayer puts the soul under the pupilage of God. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.' This is more than naked knowledge, wisdom how to use it. Study may make one a great scholar in the Scriptures, but prayer makes a wise Christian, as it obtains sanctified knowledge, without which it is no perfect gift, but *doron a doron*, a gift and no gift. Pray then with an humble boldness: God gives it to all that ask, and that candidly, liberally: not like proud man, who will rather put one to shame who is weak, for his ignorance, than take the pains to teach him. Thy petition is very pleasing to God. Remember how Solomon sped upon the like occasion, and promise thyself the same success. Christ's school is a free school; he denies none that come to him, so they will submit to the orders of the school; and though all have not an answer in the same degree of knowledge, it is not needful that all should be Solomons in knowledge, except all were to be Solomons in place; yet the meanest disciple that Christ sends forth shall be furnished with saving knowledge enough to fit him for his admittance into heaven's academy. 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after bring me to glory.'

Fourthly, Thou must bestow some time for thy diligent search after truth. Truth lies deep, and must be digged for. Since man was turned out of paradise, he can do nothing without labour, except sin; this follows his hand indeed, but this treasure of knowledge calls for spade and mattock. We are bid 'search the Scriptures;' and Dan. xii. 4, 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;' a metaphor from merchants, who bestir themselves to get an estate, run to and fro, first in one land, then in another; wherever they hear of anything to be got, thither they post, though to the ends of the earth: thus must the soul run from one duty to another, one while read, and anon meditate of what he hath read, then pray over his meditations, and ask counsel after all. What is the meaning of this, and how understand you that? *Non schola Epicura facit magnos viros, sed contubernium.* There is more light got sometimes by a short conference with a preacher, than by his whole sermon. Be sure thou compass all the means for knowledge within the walk of thy endeavour. In this thy search for knowledge observe three things:

First, The end thou proposest, that it be pure and holy, not merely to know, as some do, who labour for knowledge, as many for estates, and when they have got it, look on their notions, as they on their bags of money, but have not a heart to use their knowledge for their own or others' good; this is a sore evil. Speculative knowledge, like Rachel, is fair, but barren. Not to be known and admired by others for thy stature in knowledge above thy brethren; verily it is too base an end to aim at in seeking knowledge, especially such as is the knowlege of God and Christ. To see a heathen study for knowledge in philosophy, and then carry all his labour to this market, and think himself rewarded with obtaining the name of a wise man, is, though base, yet more tolerable; but for one that knows God, and what it is to enjoy him; for such a one to content himself with a blast or two of sorry man's vain breath, this is folly with a witness: look thou fliest higher in the end than so. Labour for knowledge that thou mayest fear God whom thou knowest; thus David, Psa. cxix. 33, 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end.' The

Digitized by Google

word of God is called a light unto our feet, not to our tongues merely to talk of, but feet to walk by: endeavour for it, not that thou mayest spread thy own name, but celebrate God. As David promiseth, when he understands the precepts of God, then he will talk of his wondrous works, he will trumpet the fame of them, and thereby awaken others to inquire after God.

Secondly, When thy end is right set, then thou must be constant in thy endeavour after it. The mysteries of Christ are not learned in a day. 'Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord,' Hos. vi. 3. Some are in a good mood, may be, and they will look into the Bible, and read a chapter or two, and away they go for a week, and never practise it more; like some young boys, if at school one day, truant all the week after: is it any wonder such thrive not in knowledge? It is a good speech of Bernard, *Tantum distat studium a lectione, quantum amicitia ab hospitio, socialis affectio, a fortuita salutatione.* The study of the word, and the reading of it, differs as much as the friendship of such who every day converse lovingly together doth from the acquaintance one hath with a stranger at an inn, or whom he salutes as he passeth by in the streets. If you will get knowledge indeed, you must not only salute the word now and then, but walk with it, and enter into daily converse with it. The three men, who were indeed angels, that stood by Abraham, as he sat at his tent-door, were reserved and strange, till Abraham invited them into his tent, and entertained them friendly; and then Christ (who was one among them, as appears by the name Jehovah given him in several verses, and also by what he promised he would do for Sarah, ver. 10, not what God would do, which, if a created angel, he would), begins to discover himself to Abraham, and reveal his secrets to him. That soul above others shall be acquainted with the secrets of God in his word, that doth not slightly read the word, and as it were compliment with it at his tent-door, but desires more intimacy with it, and therefore entertains it within his soul by frequent meditating of it. David compares the word for sweetness to 'the honey and the honey-comb.' Indeed, it is so full, that at first reading some sweetness will now and then drop from it, but he that doth not press it by meditation, leaves the most behind.

Thirdly, Be sure thou takest the right order and method. Arts and sciences have their rudiments, and also their more abstruse and deep notions; and sure the right end to begin at, is first to learn the principles; he, we say, is not like to make a good scholar in the university, that never was a good grammar-scholar. And they cannot be solid Christians, that are not instructed in the grounds of Christianity. The want of this is the cause why many are so unstedfast; first of this way, and then of that, blown like glasses into any shape, as false teachers please to breathe. Alas! they have no centre to draw their lines from. Think it no disgrace, you who have run into error, and lost yourselves in the labyrinths of deep points, which now are the great discourse of the weakest professors, to be set back to learn the first principles of the oracles of God better; too many are, as Tertullian saith in another case, *pudoris magis memores quam salutis*, more tender of their reputation than their salvation, who are more ashamed to be thought ignorant, than careful to have it cured.

Fifthly, If thou wouldst attain to divine knowledge, wait on the ministry of the word. As for those who neglect this, and come not where the word is preached, they do like one that should turn his back to the sun, that he may see it; if thou wouldest know God, come where he hath appointed thee to learn. Indeed, where the means is not, God hath extraordinary ways; as a father, if no school in town, will teach his child at home; but if there be a public school, thither he sends him. 'God maketh manifest' saith Paul, 'the savour of his knowledge by us in every place,' 2 Cor. ii. 14. Let men talk of the Spirit what they please, he will at last be found a quencher of the Spirit, that is a despiser of prophecy; they both stand close together: 1 Thess. v. 19, 20, 'Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesying.' But it is not enough to sit under the means; woful experience teacheth us this; there are some no sun will tan; they keep their own complexion under the most shining and burning light of the word preached, as ignorant and profane as those that never saw gospel-day; and therefore if thou wilt receive any spiritual advantage by the word, take heed how thou hearest.

Digitized by Google

First, Look thou art a wakeful hearer. Is it any wonder he should go away from the sermon no wiser than he came, that sleeps the greatest part of it away, or hears between sleeping and waking? It must be in a dream sure, if God reveals anything of his mind to him. So indeed God did to the fathers of old; but it was not as they profanely slept under an ordinance. O take heed of such irreverence. He that composeth himself to sleep, as some do, at such a time, or he that is not humbled for it, and that deeply, both of them betray a base and low esteem they have of the ordinance. Surely thou thinkest but meanly of what is delivered, if it will not keep thee awake; yea, of God himself, whose message it is. See how thou art reproved by the awful carriage of a heathen, and that a king; Ehud did but say to Eglon, 'I have a message from God unto thee, and he arose out of his seat,' Judg. iii. 20. And thou clappest down on thy seat to sleep! O how darest thou put such an affront upon the great God? How oft did you fall asleep at dinner, or telling your money? And is not the word of God worth more than these? I should wonder if such sermon-sleepers do dream of anything but hell-fire. It is dangerous you know to fall asleep with a candle burning by your side; some have been so burnt in their beds: but more dangerous to sleep while the candle of the word is shining so near us. What if you should sink down dead, like Eutychus? here is no Paul to raise you as he had; and that you shall not, where is your security?

Secondly, Thou must be an attentive hearer. He that is awake, but wanders with his eye or heart, what doth he but sleep with his eyes open? It were as good the servant should be asleep in his bed, as when up not to mind his master's business. When God intends a soul good by the word, he draws such a one to listen and harken heedfully to what is delivered; as we see in Lydia, 'who,' it is said, 'attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.' And those, Luke xix. 48: 'The people were attentive to hear him.' They did hang on him as you shall see bees on some sweet flower, or as young birds on the bills of their dams as they feed them; that is the soul which shall get light and life by the word. 'Hear, ye children, and attend to know understanding,' Prov. iv. 1. Labour, therefore, in hearing the word, to fix thy quicksilver mind, and set thyself to hear, as it is said Jehoshaphat did to pray, and that thou mayest before thou goest get thy heart into some deep sense of thy spiritual wants, especially of thy ignorance of the things of God, and thy deplored condition by reason of it; till the heart be touched, the mind will not be fixed. Therefore you may observe, it is said, 'God opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended,' Acts xvi. 14. The mind goes of the will's errand; we spend our thoughts upon what our hearts propose. If the heart hath no sense of its ignorance, or no desires after God, no wonder such a one listens not what the preacher saith, his heart sends his mind another way. 'They sit before thee as my people,' saith God, 'but their heart goeth after their covetousness.' They do not come out of such an intent or desire to hear for any good to their souls, then they would apply themselves wholly to the work; no, it is their covetousness hath their hearts; and, therefore, as some idle servant, when he hath waited on his master, brought him to his pew, then he goes out to his good fellows at the ale-house, and comes no more till sermon be almost done; so do the thoughts of most when they go to the ordinance, they slip out in the street, market, or shop, you may find them any where but about the duty before them, and all because these have their hearts more than God and his word.

Thirdly, Thou must be a retentive hearer; without this the work will ever be to begin again. Truths to a forgetful hearer are as a seal set on water, the impression lasts no longer than the seal is on; the sermon once done, and all is undone: be therefore very careful to fasten what thou hearest on thy memory, which that thou mayest do,

First, receive the truth in the love of it. An affectionate hearer will not be a forgetful hearer. Love helps the memory; 'Can a woman forget her child, or a maid her ornaments, or a bride her attire?' No, they love them too well: were the truths of God thus precious to thee, thou wouldst with David think of them day and night. Even when the Christian, through weakeness of memory, cannot remember the very words he hears, to repeat them; yea, then he keeps

Digitized by Google

the power and savour of them in his spirit, as when sugar is dissolved in wine, you cannot see it, but you may taste it; when meat is eaten and digested, it is not to be found as it was received, but the man is cheered and strengthened by it, more able to walk and work than before, by which you may know it is not lost: so you may taste the truths the Christian heard, in his spirit, see them in his life. Perhaps if you ask him what the particulars were the minister had about faith, mortification, repentance, and the like, he cannot tell you; yet this you may find, his heart is more broken for sin, more enabled to rely on the promises, and now weaned from the world. As that good woman answered one, that coming from the sermon, asked her what she remembered of the sermon, said, She could not at present recall much, but she heard that which should make her reform some things as soon as she came home.

Secondly, Meditate on what thou hearest; by this David got more wisdom than his teachers. Observe what truth, what scripture is cleared to thee in the sermon more than before, take some time in secret to converse with it, and make it thereby familiar to thy understanding. Meditation is to the sermon what the harrow is to the seed, it covers those truths which else might have been picked or washed away. I am afraid there are many proofs turned down at a sermon, that are hardly turned up and looked on any more when the sermon is done; and if so, you make others believe you are greater traders for your souls than you are indeed; as if one should come to a shop and lay by a great deal of rich ware, and when he hath done, goes away and never calls for it. O take heed of such doings. The hypocrite cheats himself worst at last.

Thirdly, Discharge thy memory of what is sinful. We wipe our table-book, and deface what is there scribbled, before we can write new. There is such a contrariety betwixt the truths of God and all that is frothy and sinful, that one puts out the other; if you would retain the one, you must let the other go.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE DEVILS' NATURE, AND THEIR EXTREME WICKEDNESS.

Against spiritual wickedness.

THESE words are the fourth branch in the description, 'Spiritual wickednesses;' and our contest or combat with them as such, expressed by the adversative particle 'against,' in the Greek, *pros ta pneumatica tes ponerias*, word for word, 'against the spirituals of wickedness,' which is, as say some, 'against wicked spirits;' that is true, but not all. I conceive with many interpreters, not only the spiritual nature of the devil, and the wickedness thereof, to be intended, but also, yea, chiefly, the nature and kind of those sins which these wicked spirits do most usually and vigorously provoke the saints unto, and they are the spirituals of wickedness, not those gross fleshly sins, which the herd of beastly sinners, like swine, wallow in, but sin spiritualised, and this, because it is not *pneumata*, but *pneumatica*, not spirits, but spirituals. The words present us with these three doctrinal conclusions.

First, The devils are spirits.

Secondly, The devils are spirits extremely wicked.

Thirdly, These wicked spirits do chiefly annoy the saints with, and provoke them to spiritual wickednesses.

SECTION I.—First, They are spirits. Spirit is a word of various acceptation in Scripture. Amongst other used often to set forth the essence and nature of angels, good and evil, both which are called spirits. The holy angels, Heb. i. 14: 'Are they not all ministering spirits?' The evil, 'There came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him,' 1 Kings xxii. 21; that spirit was a devil. How oft is the devil called the unclean spirit, foul spirit, lying spirit, &c. Sin did not alter their substance; for then, as one saith well, that nature and substance which transgressed could not be punished.

First, The devil is a spirit; that is, his essence is immaterial and simple, not compounded (as corporal beings are) of matter and form: 'Handle and see me,' (saith Christ to his disciples, that thought they had seen a spirit), 'a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have,' Luke xxiv. 39. If they were not

Digitized by Google

thus immaterial, how could they enter into bodies and possess them, as the Scripture tells us they have, even a legion into one man? Luke viii. 30. One body cannot thus enter into another.

Secondly, The devils are spiritual substances, not qualities, or evil motions arising from us, as some have absurdly conceived. So the Sadducees, and others following them, deny any such being as an angel, good or evil; but this is so fond a conceit, that we must both forfeit our reason, and deny the Scriptures to maintain it, where we find their creation related, Col. i. 18; the fall of some from their first estate, Jude 6; and the standing of others, called the elect angels. The happiness of the one, who behold God's face; and their employment—being sent out to attend on the saints as servants on their master's heirs, Heb. i. The misery of the other, reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day; and their present work, which is to do mischief to the souls and bodies of men, as far as they are permitted. All of which shew their subsistence plain enough. But so immersed is sorry man in flesh, that he will not easily believe what he sees not with his fleshly eyes; upon the same account we may deny the being of God himself, because invisible.

Thirdly, They are entire spiritual substances, which have every one proper existence: and thus they are distinguished from the souls of men, which are made to subsist in a human body; and together with it to make one perfect man, so that the soul, though when separated from the body doth exist, yet hath a tendency to union with its body again.

Fourthly, They are, though entire spiritual substances, yet finite, being but creatures. God only is the uncreated, infinite, and absolutely simple Spirit, yea, Father of all other spirits.

Now from this spiritual nature of the devil, we may further see what a dreadful enemy we have to grapple with.

First, As spirits, they are of vast intellectual abilities. Sorry man, while in this dark prison of the body, hath not light enough to know what angelical perfections are; that they excel in knowledge all other creatures, we know, because as spirits they come nearest by creation to the nature of God that made them; the heavens are not lifted higher from the earth, than angels by knowledge from man while on earth. Man by art hath learnt to take the height of the stars of heaven; but where is he that can tell how far in knowledge angels exceed man? It is true, they have lost much of that knowledge they had, even all their knowledge as holy angels; what now they know of God hath lost its savour, and they have no power to use it for their own good. What Jude saith of wicked men, may be said of them, 'What they know naturally, in these things they corrupt themselves.' They know the holiness of God, but love him not for it, as the elect angels do, and themselves by creation did. They know the evil of sin, and love it not the less: but though they are such fools for themselves, yet have subtilty too much for all the saints on earth, if we had not a God to play our game for us.

Secondly, As spirits they are invisible, and their approaches also. They come, and you see not your enemy. Indeed this makes him so little feared by the ignorant world, whereas it is his greatest advantage, if rightly weighed. O if men have an apparition of the devil, or hear a noise in the night, they cry, The devil, the devil! and are ready to run out of their wits for fear; but they carry him in their hearts, and walk all the day long in his company, and fear him not. When thy proud heart is clambering up to the pinnacle of honour in thy ambitious thoughts, who sets thee there but the devil? When thy adulterous heart is big with all manner of uncleanness and filthiness, who but Satan hath been there, begetting these brats on thy whorish spirit? When thou art raging in thy passion, throwing burning coals of wrath and fury about with thy inflamed tongue, where was it set on fire but of hell? When thou art hurried like the swine down the precipice, and even choked with thy own drunken vomit, who but the devil rides thee?

Thirdly, As spirits, they are immortal. Of other enemies you may hear news at last that they are dead which sought thy life, as the angel told Joseph of Herod. Persecuting men walk a turn or two upon the stage, and are called off by death, and there is an end of all their plots: but devils die not, they will

Digitized by Google

hunt thee to thy grave, and when thou diest they will meet thee in another world, to accuse and torment thee there also.

Fourthly, They are unwearied in their motions. When the fight is over among men, the conqueror must sit down and breathe, and so loseth the chase, because not able to pursue it in time. Yea, some have given over their empires, as glutted with the blood of men, and weary of the work, when they cannot have their will as they desired. Thus Dioclesian, because he saw he did but mow a meadow that grew the thicker for the cutting down (as Tertullian speaks of the Christians martyred), he throws away his sceptre in a pet. Charles the Fifth did the like (some say) upon the same reason, because he could not root out the Lutherans. But the devil's spirit is never cowed, nor he weary of doing mischief, though he hath never stood still since first he began his walk to and fro in the world. O what would become of us if a God were not at our back, who is infinitely more the devil's odds than he ours?

SECTION II.—Secondly, They are wicked spirits; wicked in the abstract, as in the text, and called by way of eminency in sin, 'The wicked one,' Matt. xiii. 19, as God is called the Holy One, because 'none holy as the Lord;' so the devil the wicked one, because he is a nonsuch in sin. In a few particulars let us endeavour to take the height of the devil's sin, and the rather, that we may judge of the degrees of sins, and sinners, among the sons of men: the nearer God in holiness, the more holy; the liker the devil, the more wicked.

First, These apostate angels are the inventors of sin; the first that sounded the trumpet of rebellion against their Maker, and led the dance to all that sin which since hath filled the world. Now what tongue can accent this sin to its full? For such a noble creature, whom God hath set on the top, as it were, of all the creation, nearest to himself, from whom God hath kept nothing but his own royal diadem; for this peer and favourite of the court, without any cause or solicitation from any other, to make this bold and blasphemous attempt to snatch at God's own crown, this paints the devil blacker than the thoughts of men and angels can conceive. He is called 'the father of lies,' as those who have found out any art who are called the father of it. 'Jubal, the father of all such as handle the harp and organ;' he invented music. And this is a dreadful aggravation, because they sinned without a tempter. And though man is not in such a degree capable of this aggravation, yet some men sin after the very similitude of the devil's transgression in this respect, who, as Paul, Rom. i. 3, styles them, 'are inventors of evil things.' Indeed sin is an old trade, found out to our hand: but as in other trades and arts, some famous men arise, who add to the inventions of others, and make trades and arts as it were new; so there are ever some infamous in their generation, that make old sins new, by superadding to the wickedness of others. Uncleanness is an old sin from the beginning, but the Sodomites will be filthy in a new way; and therefore it carries their name to this day. Some invent new errors, others new oaths, such as are of their own coining, hot out of the mint; they scorn to swear after the old fashion: others new devices of persecuting, as Julian had a way by himself different from all before him: and to the end of the world every age will exceed other in the degrees of sinning. Ishmael and the mockers of the old world were but children and bunglers to the scoffers and cruel mockers of the last time. Well, take heed of shewing thy wit in inventing new sins, lest thou stir up God to invent new punishments. 'Is not destruction to the wicked, and a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity?' Job xxxi. 3. Sodom sinned after a new mode, and God destroys them after a new way, sending hell from above upon them. Some have invented new opinions, monstrous errors, and God hath suited their monstrous errors with births as monstrous of their own body.

Secondly, They were not only the inventors of sin, but are still the chief tempters to and promoters of sin in the world, therefore called *Peirazon*, the Tempter: and sin called 'the work of the devil,' whoever commits it; as the house goes by the name of the master-workman, though he useth his servants' hands to build it. O take heed of soliciting others to sin! Thou takest the devil's office, as I may say, out of his hand; let him do it himself, if he will: make not thyself so like him. To tempt another, is worse than to sin thyself. It speaks sin to be of great growth in that man, that doth it knowingly and

Digitized by Google

willingly. Herbs and flowers shed not their seed till ripe; creatures propagate not till of stature and age. What do those that tempt others, but diffuse their wicked opinions and practices, and as it were raise up seed to the devil, thereby to keep up the name of their infernal father in the world? This shews sin is mighty in them indeed. Many a man, though so cruel to his own soul as to be drunk or swear, yet will not like this in a child or servant; what are they then but devils incarnate, who teach their children the devil's catechism, to swear and lie, drink and drab? If you meet such, be not afraid to call them (as Paul did Elymas, when he would have perverted the deputy), children of the devil, full of all subtilty and mischief, and enemies of all righteousness. O do you not know what you do, when you tempt? I will tell you; you do that which you cannot undo by your own repentance; thou poisonest one with error, initiatest another in the devil's school (ale-house, I mean), but afterwards, it may be, thou seest thy mistake, and recantest thy error, thy folly, and givest over thy drunken trade. Art thou sure now to rectify and convert them with thyself? Alas, poor creatures! this is out of thy power; they, perhaps, will say, as he (though he did it upon a better account) that was solicited to turn back to popery by him who had before persuaded him to renounce the same: 'You have given me one turn, but shall not give me another:' and what a grief to thy spirit will it be, to see these going to hell on thy errand, and thou not able to call them back! Thou mayest cry out as Lamech, 'I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.' Nay, when thou art asleep in thy grave, he whom thou seducedst may have drawn in others, and thy name may be quoted to commend the opinion and practice to others; by which, as it is said, though in another sense, 'Abel, being dead, yet speaks'), thou mayst, though dead, sin in those that are alive, generation after generation. A little spark kindled by the error of one, hath cost the pains of many ages to quench it; and when thought to be out, it hath broken forth again.

Thirdly, They are not barely wicked, but maliciously wicked. The devil's name denoteth his spiteful nature, his desire to vex and injure others. When he draws souls to sin, it is not because he tastes any sweetness, or finds any profit therein; he hath too much light to have any joy or peace in sin; he knows his doom, and trembles at the thought of it, and yet his spiteful nature makes him violently desire, and incessantly endeavour, the damnation of souls. As you shall see a mad dog run after a flock of sheep, kill one, then another, and when dead not able to eat of their flesh, but kills to kill: so Satan is carried out with a boundless rage against man, especially the saints: he would not, if he could, leave one of Christ's flock alive; such is the height of his malice against God, whom he hates with a perfect hatred, and because he cannot reach him with a direct blow, therefore he strikes him at second hand through his saints; that wicked arm which reacheth not to God, is extended against these excellent on the earth, well knowing the life of God is in a manner bound up in theirs. God cannot outlive his honour, and his honour speeds as his mercy is exalted or depressed; this being the attribute God means to honour in their salvation so highly, and therefore maligned above the rest by Satan. And this is the worst that can be said of these wicked spirits, that they maliciously spite God, and in God the glory of his mercy.

Use 1. First, This may help us to conceive more fully what the desperate wickedness of man's nature is, which is so hard to be known, because it can never be seen at once, it being a fountain whose immensity consists not in the stream of actual sin (that is visible, and may seem little), but in the spring that incessantly feeds this: but here is a glass that will give us the shape of our hearts truly like themselves. Seest thou the monstrous pitch and height of wickedness that is in the devil? All this there is in the heart of every man; there is no less wickedness, potentially, in the tamest sinner on earth, than in the devils themselves; and that one day thou, whoever thou art, wilt shew to purpose, if God prevent thee not by his renewing grace; thou art not yet fledged, thy wings are not grown to make thee a flying dragon, but thou art of the same brood, the seed of this serpent is in thee, and the devil begets a child like himself; thou yet standest in a soil not so proper for the ripening of sin, which will not come to its fulness till transplanted into hell. Thou who art

Digitized by Google

here so diffident and modest, as to blush at some sins out of shame, and forbear the acting of others out of fear, when there thou shalt see thy case as desperate as the devil doth his, then thou wilt spit out thy blasphemies, with which thy nature is stuffed with the same malice that he doth. The Indians have a conceit, that when they die, they shall be transformed into the deformed likeness of the devil; therefore in their language they have the same word for a dead man and the devil. Sin makes the wicked like him before they come there, but indeed they will come to their countenance more fully there, when those flames shall wash off that paint which here hides their complexion. The saints in heaven shall be like the angels in their alacrity, love, and constancy to serve God, and the damned, like the devils in sin as well as punishment. This one consideration might be of excellent use to unbottom a sinner, and abase him, so as never to have high thoughts of himself. It is easy to run down a person whose life is wicked, and convince him of the evil of his actions, and make him confess that what he doth is evil; but here is the thicket we lose him in; he will say, 'It is true I am overseen, I do what I should not, God forgive me; but my heart is good.' Thy heart good, sinner! and so is the devil's; his nature is wicked, and thine as bad as his. These pimples in thy face shew the heat of thy corrupt nature within, and without gospel physic, the blood of Christ applied to thee, thou wilt die a leper; none but Christ can give thee a new heart, till which thou wilt every day grow worse. Sin is an hereditary disease, that increaseth with age. A young sinner will be an old devil.

Use 2. Again, It would be of use to the saints, especially those in whom God by his timely call forestalled the devil's market; as sometimes the Spirit of God takes sin in its quarters before it comes into the field, in the sins of youth; now such a one finding not those daring sins committed by him, that others have been left unto, may possibly not be affected so with his own sin, or God's mercy. O let such a one behold here the wickedness of his heart in this glass of the devil's nature, and he will see himself as great a debtor to the mercy of God as Manasses, or the worst of sinners; as in pardoning, so in preventing the same cursed nature with theirs, before it rose against God with those bloody sins they committed. That thou didst not act such outrageous sins, thou art beholden to God's gracious restraint, and not to the goodness of thy nature, which hath the devil's stamp on it, for which God might have crushed thee, as we do the brood of serpents before they sting, knowing what they will do in time. Who will say that Faux suffered unjustly, because the parliament was not blown up. It was enough that the materials for that massacre were provided, and he taken there with match and fire about him, ready to lay the train; and canst thou say, when God first took hold on thee, that thou hadst not those weapons of rebellion about thee, a nature fully charged with enmity against God, which in time would have made its own report of what for present lay like unfired powder silent in thy bosom? O Christian, think of this, and be humbled for thy villanous nature, and say, Blessed be God, that sent his Spirit and grace so opportunely to stay thy hand, as Abigail to David, while thy nature meditated nothing but war against God and his laws.

Again, Thirdly, Are the devils so wickedly malicious against God himself? O sirs, take the right notion of sin, and you will hate it. The reason why we are so easily persuaded to sin is, because we understand not the bottom of his design in drawing a creature to sin. It is with men in sinning as it is with armies in fighting; captains beat their drums for volunteers, and promise all that enlist, pay and plunder; and this makes them come trooping in; but few consider what the ground of the war is, against whom, or for what. Satan enticeth to sin, and gives golden promises what they shall have in his service, with which silly souls are won; but how few ask their souls, Whom do I sin against? What is the devil's design in drawing me to sin? Shall I tell thee? Dost thou think it is thy pleasure or profit he desires in thy sinning? Alas, he means nothing less; he hath greater plots in his head than so. He hath by his apostasy proclaimed war against God, and he brings thee by sinning to espouse his quarrel, and to hazard the life of thy soul in defence of his pride and lust; which that he may do, he cares no more for the damnation of thy soul, than the great Turk doth to see a company of his slaves cut off for the carrying on of

Digitized by Google

his design in a siege: and darest thou venture to go into the field upon his quarrel against God? O earth, tremble thou at the presence of the Lord. This bloody Joab sets thee where never any came off alive. O stand not where God's bullets fly; throw down thy arms, or thou art a dead man. Whatever others do, O ye saints, abhor the thoughts of sinning willingly, which, when you do, you help the devil against God; and what more unnatural, than for a child to be seen in arms against his father?

CHAPTER VII.

OF SATAN'S PLOT TO DEFILE THE CHRISTIAN'S SPIRIT WITH HEART-SINS.

The second point follows.

Doct. 2. THAT these wicked spirits do chiefly annoy the saints with, and provoke them to, spiritual sins. Sins may be called spiritual upon a double account; either from the subject wherein they are acted, or from the object about which they are conversant.

First, In regard of the subject; when the spirit or heart is the stage whereon sin is acted, this is a spiritual sin; such are all impure thoughts, vile affections and desires; though the object be fleshly lust, yet are spiritual sins, because they are purely acts of the soul and spirit, and break not forth unto the outward man.

Secondly, In regard of the object; when that is spiritual, and not carnal, such as are idolatry, error, spiritual pride, unbelief, &c., both which Paul calls 'the filthiness of the spirit,' and distinguisheth them from 'filthiness of the flesh,' 2 Cor. vii. 1.

SECTION I.—First, Of the first, Satan labours what he can to provoke the Christian to heart-sins, to stir up and foment these inward motions of sin in the Christian's bosom; hence it is, he can go about no duty, but these (his imps I may call them) haunt him; one motion or other darts in to interrupt him, as Paul tells us of himself, 'When he would do good, evil was present with him.' If a Christian should turn back whenever these cross the way of him, he should never go on his journey to heaven. It is the chief game the devil hath left to play against the children of God, now his field army is broken, and his commanding power taken away, which he had over them, to come out of these his holds where he lies skulking, and fall upon their rear with these suggestions. He knows his credit now is not so great with the soul as when it was his slave; then no drudgery work was so base, that it would not do at his command; but now the soul is out of this bondage, and he must not think to command another's servant as his own; no, all he can do, is to watch the fittest season, when the Christian least suspects, and then to present some sinful motion handsomely dressed up to the eye of the soul, that the Christian may, before he is aware, take this brat up, and handle it in his thoughts, till at last he makes it his own by embracing it; and this he knows will defile the soul: and may be this boy, sent in at the window, may open the door to let in a greater thief; or if he should not so prevail, yet the guilt of these heart-sins, yea, their very neighbourhood, will be a sad vexation to a gracious heart, whose nature is so pure that it abhors all filthiness; so that to be haunted with such motions, is as if a living man should be chained to a stinking carcase, that wherever he goes he must draw that after him; and whose love is so dear to Christ, that it cannot bear the company of those thoughts without amazement and horror, which are so contrary and abusive to his beloved. This makes Satan so desirous to be ever raking in the unregenerate part, that as a dunghill stirred, it may offend them both with the noisome steams which arise from it.

SECTION II.—*Use* 1. First, Let this be for a trial of thy spiritual state. What entertainment finds Satan when he comes with these spirituals of wickedness, and solicits thee to dwell on them? Canst thou dispense with the filthiness of thy spirit, so thy hands be clean? Or dost thou wrestle against these heart-sins as well as others? I do not ask whither such guests come within thy door; for the worst of sins may be found, in the motions of them, not only passing by the door of a Christian, but looking in also; as holy motions may be found stirring in the bosom of wicked men. But I ask thee, whether thou canst find in thy

Digitized by Google

heart to lodge these guests, and bid them welcome? It is like thou wouldst not be seen to walk in the street with such company, not violently break open thy neighbour's house to murder or rob him; but canst thou not, under thy own roof, in the withdrawing room of thy soul, let thy thoughts hold up an unclean lust, while thy heart commits speculative folly with it? Canst thou not draw thy neighbour into thy den, and there rend him limb from limb by thy malice, and thy heart not so much as cry murder, murder? In a word, canst thou hide any one sin in the vance-roof of thy heart, there to save the life of it, when inquired after by the word and Spirit, as Rahab hid the spies, and sent the king of Jericho's messengers to pursue them, as if they had been gone? Perhaps thou canst say, The adulterer, the murderer is not here; thou hast sent these sins away long ago; and all this while thou hidest them; for the love of thy soul know it, or thou shalt another day know it to thy cost; thou art stark naught. If there were a spark of the life of God, or the love of Christ in thy bosom, though thou couldst not hinder such motions in thy soul, yet thou wouldst not conceal them, much less nourish them in thy bosom; when overpowered by them, thou wouldst call in help from Heaven against these destroyers of thy soul.

Use 2. Secondly, Shew your loyalty, O ye saints, to God, by a vigorous resistance of and wrestling against these spirituals of wickedness. First, consider, Christian, heart-sins are sins as well as any; 'The thought of foolishness is sin,' Prov. xxiv. 9. Mercury is poison in the water distilled, as well as in the gross body. Uncleanness, covetousness, murder, are such in the heart, as well as in the outward; every point of hell is hell. Secondly, consider, thy spirit is the seat of the Holy Spirit. He takes up the whole heart for his lodgings; and it is time for him to be gone when he sees his house let over his head. Defile not thy spirit till thou art weary of his company. Thirdly, consider, there may be more wickedness in a sin of the heart than of the hand, or outward man; for the aggravation of these is taken from the behaviour of the heart in the act. The more of the heart and spirit is let out, the more malignity is let into any sinful act. To backslide in the heart, is more than to backslide; it is the comfort of a poor soul when tempted and troubled for his relapses, that though his foot slides back, yet his heart turns not back, but faceth heaven and Christ at the same time; so to err in the heart, is worse than to have an error in the head; therefore God aggravates Israel's sin with this, 'They do always err in their heart,' Heb. iii. 10. Their hearts run them upon the error; they liked idolatry, and so were soon made to believe what pleased them best. As on the contrary, the more of the heart and spirit is in any holy service, the more real goodness there is in it, though it fall short of others in the outward expression. The widow's two mites surpassed all the rest, Christ himself being Judge; so in sin, though the internal acts of sin, in thoughts and affections, seem light upon man's balance, if compared with outward acts; yet these may be so circumstanced that they may exceed the other in God's account. Peter lays the accent of Magus's sin on the wicked thought, which his words betrayed to be in his heart; 'Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven,' Acts viii. 22. Saul's sin in sparing Agag, and saving the best of the sheep and oxen, which he was commanded to destroy, was materially a far less sin than David's adultery and murder, yet it is made equal with a greater than both, even witchcraft itself, 1 Sam. xv. 23. And whence received his sin such a dye, but from the wickedness of his heart, that was worse than David's when deepest in the temptation? Fourthly, if Satan get into thy spirit and defile it, O how hard wilt thou find it to stay there? Thou hast already sipped of his broth, and now art more likely to be overcome at last to sit down and make thy full meal of that, which by tasting hath vitiated thy palate already. It were strange if, while thou art musing, and thy heart hot with the thought of lust, the fire should not break forth at thy lips, or worse.

Quest. But what help have we against this sort of Satan's temptation?

Answ. I suppose thee a Christian that maketh this question; and if thou dost it in the plainness of thy heart, it proves thee one. Who besides will, or can desire in earnest, to be eased of these guests? Even when a carnal heart prays for deliverance from them, he would be loth his prayer should be heard. 'Not

Digitized by Google

yet Lord,' the heart of such a one cries, as Austin confessed himself. Sin is as truly the offspring of the soul, as children are of our bodies, and it finds as much favour in our eyes, yea, more; for the sinner can slay a son to save a sin alive, Micah vi. 7; and of all sins, none are more cherished than these heart-sins.

First, Because they are the first-born of the sinful heart, and the chiefest strength of the soul is laid out upon them.

Secondly, Because the heart hath more scope in them than in outward acts. The proud man is staked down oft to a short state, and cannot ruffle it in the world, and appear to others in that pomp he would; but within his own bosom he can set up a stage, and in his own foolish heart present himself as great a prince as he pleaseth. The malicious can kill in his desires as many in a few minutes, as the angel smote in a night of Sennacherib's host. Nero thus could slay all Rome on the block at once.

Thirdly, These sins stay with the soul when the others leave it; when the sinner hath crippled his body with drunkenness and filthiness, and proves *milese meritus*, cannot follow the devil's camp any longer in those ways, then these cursed lusts will entertain the sinner with stories of his old pranks and pleasures. In a word, these inward lusts of the heart have nothing but the conscience of a Deity to quell them. Other sins put the sinner to shame before men; and as some that believed on Christ, durst not confess him openly, because they loved the praise of men, so there are sinners who are kept from vouching their lust openly, for the same tenderness to their reputation; but here is no fear of that, if they can but forget that heaven sees them, or persuade themselves there is no danger from thence; the coast then is clear, they may be as wicked as they please. These make inward sins so hugged and embraced. If thou therefore canst find thy heart set against these, I may venture to call thee a real Christian, and for thy help against them,

First, Be earnest with God in prayer to move and order thy heart in its thoughts and desires. If the tongue be such an unruly thing that few can tame, O what is the heart, where such a multitude of thoughts are flying forth as thick as bees from the hive, and sparks from the furnace! It is not in man, not in the holiest on earth, to do this without Divine assistance. Therefore we find David so often crying out in this respect to order his steps in his word, to unite his heart to his fear, to incline his heart to his testimonies. As a servant, when the child he tends is troublesome, and will not be ruled by him, calls out to the father to come to him, who no sooner speaks but all is silence with him: no doubt holy David found his heart beyond his skill or power, that makes him so oft do its errand to God. Indeed, God hath promised thus much to his children, to order their steps for them, Psalm xxxvii. 22; only he looks they should bring their hearts to him for that end. 'Commit thy work to the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established,' Prov. xvi. 3, or ordered. Art thou setting they face towards an ordinance, where thou art sure to meet Satan, who will be disturbing thee with wordly thoughts, and may be worse? let God know from thy mouth whither thou art going, and what thy fears are; never doth the soul march in so goodly order, as when it puts itself under the conduct of God.

Secondly, Set a strong guard about thy outward senses: these are Satan's landing places, especially the eye and the ear. Take heed what thou importest at these; vain discourse seldom passeth without leaving some tincture upon the heart: as unwholesome air inclines to putrefaction things sweet in themselves, so unsavoury discourse to corrupt the mind that is pure; look thou breathest therefore in a clear air. And for thy eye, let it not wander; wanton objects cause wanton thoughts. Job knew his eye and his thoughts were like to go together, and therefore to secure one, he covenants with the other, Job xxxi. 1.

Thirdly, Often reflect upon thyself in a day, and observe what company is with thy heart. A careful master will ever and anon be looking into his workhouse, and see what his servants are doing, and a wise Christian should do the same. We may know by the noise in the school, the master is not there: much of the misrule in our bosoms ariseth from the neglect of visiting our hearts. Now, when thou art parleying with thy soul, make this threefold inquiry:

First, Whether that which thy heart is thinking on be good or evil. If evil and wicked, such as are proud, unclean, distrustful thoughts, show thy abhor-

Digitized by Google

rence of them, and chide thy soul sharply for so much as holding conference with them, of which nought can come but dishonour to God, and mischief to thy own soul; and stir up thy heart to mourn for the evil neighbourhood of them, and by this thou shalt give a testimony of thy faithfulness to God. When David mourned for Abner, all Israel, it is said, 'understood that day, that it was not of the king to slay Abner:' thy mourning for them will show these thoughts are not so much of thee, as of Satan.

Secondly, If they be not broadly wicked, inquire whether they be not empty, frothy, vain imaginations, that have no subserviency to the glory of God, thy own good, or others'; and if so, leave not till thou hast made thyself apprehensive of Satan's design on thee in them; though such are not for thy purpose, yet they are for his, they serve his turn to keep thee from better. All the water is lost that runs beside the mill, and all thy thoughts are waste which help thee not to do God's work withal in thy general or particular calling. The bee will not sit on a flower where no honey can be sucked, neither should the Christian. Why sittest thou here idle, thou shouldest say to thy soul, when thou hast so much to do for God and thy soul, and so little time to despatch it in?

Thirdly, If thou findest they are good for matter thy heart is busied about, then inquire whether they be good for time and manner, which, being wanting, they degenerate.

First, For the season; that is good fruit which is brought forth in its season. Christ liked the work his mother would have put him upon as well as herself, (John ii.) but his time was not come. Good thoughts and meditations misplaced, are like some interpretations of Scripture, good truths, but bad expositions; they fit not the place they are drawn from, nor these the time. To pray when we should hear, or be musing on the sermon when we should pray, this is to rob God one way to pay him another.

Secondly, Carefully observe the manner. Thy heart may meditate a good matter, and spoil it in the doing. Thou art, may be, musing of thy sins, and affecting thy heart into a sense of them, but so, that while thou art stirring up thy sorrow, thou weakenest thy faith on the promise, that is thy sin. He is a bad surgeon, that in opening a vein goes so deep that he cuts an artery, and lames the arm, if not kills the man. Or thou art thinking of thy family and providing for that. This thou oughtest to do, and art worse than an infidel if thou neglectest; but perhaps these thoughts are so distracting and distrustful as if there were no promise, no providence to relieve thee. God takes this ill, because it reflects upon his care of thee. O how near doth our duty here stand to our sin! so much care is necessary ballast to the soul; a little more sinks it under the waves of unbelief; like some things very wholesome, but one degree more of hot or cold would make them poison.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW SATAN LABOURS TO CORRUPT THE CHRISTIAN'S MIND WITH ERROR.

The second sort of spiritual sins are such as are not only acted in the spirit, but are conversant about spiritual objects proper to the soul's nature, that is a spirit, and not laid out in carnal passions of fleshly lusts, in which the soul acts but as a pander for the body, and partakes of their delights only by way of sympathy; for as the soul feels the body's pains no other way than by sympathy, so neither doth it share in the pleasures of the flesh by any proper taste it hath of them, but, only from its near neighbourhood with the body, doth sympathize with its joy; but in spiritual wickednesses that corrupt the mind, here the soul moves in its own sphere, with a delight proper to itself; and there are no less of these than the other. There is hardly a fleshly lust, but hath some spiritual sin analogical to it; as they say there is no species of creatures on the land, but may be patterned in the sea: thus the heart of man can produce spiritual sins answering carnal lusts; for whoredom and uncleanness of the flesh, there is idolatry, called in Scripture spiritual adultery, from which the seat of Antichrist is called spiritual Sodom; for sensual drunkenness, there is a drunkenness of the mind, intoxicating the judgment with error; a drunkenness of

Digitized by Google

the heart in cares and fears; for carnal pride in beauty, riches, honour, there is, a spiritual pride of gifts, graces, &c. Now Satan in an especial manner assaults the Christian with such as these; it would require a larger discourse than I can allow, to run over the several kinds of them; I shall of many pick out two or three. At first, Satan labours to corrupt the mind with erroneous principles; he was at work at the very first plantation of the gospel, sowing his darnel, as soon almost as Christ his wheat, which sprung up in pernicious errors, even in the apostles' times, which made them take the weeding-hook into their hands, and in all their epistles labour to countermine Satan in this design. Now Satan hath a threefold design in this his endeavour to corrupt the minds of men, especially, professors, with error.

Section I.—First, He doth this in despite to God, against whom he cannot vent his malice at a higher rate, than by corrupting his truth, which God hath so highly honoured, Psa. cxxxviii. 2: 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' Every creature bears the name of God, but in his word and truth therein contained it is written at length, and therefore he is more choice of this than of all his other works; he cares not much what becomes of the world and all in it, so he keeps his word, and saves his truth. Ere long we shall see the world on a light flame; the heavens and earth shall pass away, 'but the word of the Lord endures for ever.' When God will, he can make more such worlds as this; but he cannot make another truth, and therefore he will not lose one jot thereof. Satan knowing this, sets all his wits on work to deface this, and disfigure it by unsound doctrine. The word is the glass in which we see God, and seeing him, are changed into his likeness by his Spirit. If this glass be cracked, then the conceptions we have of God will misrepresent him unto us; whereas the word, in its native clearness, sets him out in all his glory unto our eye.

Secondly, He endeavours to draw into this spiritual sin of error, as the most subtle and effectual means to weaken, if not destroy the power of godliness in them. The apostle joins the spirit of power and a sound mind together, 2 Tim. i. 7. Indeed the power of holiness in practice depends much on the soundness of judgment. Godliness is the child of truth; and it must be nursed, if we will have it thrive, with no other milk than that of its own mother. Therefore we are exhorted to 'desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby,' 1 Pet. ii. 2. If this milk be but a little dashed with error, it is not nutritive. All error, how innocent soever it may seem, like the ivy, draws away the strength of the soul's love from holiness. Hosea tells us, whoredom and wine take away the heart. Now error is spiritual adultery. Paul speaks of his espousing them to Christ: when a person receives an error, he takes a stranger into Christ's bed; and it is the nature of adulterous love to take away the wife's heart from her true husband, that she delights not in his company so much as in that of her adulterous lover. And do we not see it at this day fulfilled? Do not many shew more zeal in contending for one error, than for many truths? How strangely are the hearts of many taken off from the ways of God, their love cooled to the ordinances and messengers of Christ? And all this occasioned by some corrupt principle got into their bosoms, which controls Christ and his truth, as Hagar and her son did Sarah and her child. Indeed Christ will never enjoy true conjugal love from the soul, till, like Abraham, he turns these out of doors. Error is not so innocent a thing as many think it: it is as unwholesome food to the body, that poisons the spirits, and surfeits the whole body, and seldom passeth away without breaking out into sores. As the knowledge of Christ carries the soul above the pollution of the world, so error entangles and betrays it to those lusts whose hands it had escaped.

Thirdly, Satan, in drawing a soul into this spiritual sin, hath a design to disturb the peace of the church, which is rent and shattered, when this fire-ship comes among them. 'I hear,' saith Paul, 'there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it, for there must be heresies,' 1 Cor. xi. 18, 19; implying that divisions are the natural issue of heresy. Error cannot well agree with error, except it be against the truth; then indeed, like Pilate and Herod, they are easily made friends; but when truth seems to be overcome, and the battle is over with that, then they fall out among themselves; and therefore it is no

Digitized by Google

wonder if it be so troublesome a neighbour to truth. O sirs! what a sweet silence and peace was there among Christians a dozen years ago! Methinks the looking back to those blessed days in this respect (though they had also in another way their troubles, yet not so uncomfortable, because that storm united, this scatters the saints' spirits), is joyous to remember in what unity and love Christians walked, so that the persecutors of those times might have said, as their predecessors did of the saints in primitive times, 'See how they love one another!' but now, alas! they may jeer and say, See how they that loved so dearly are ready to pluck one another's eyes out!

SECTION I.—*Use.* The application of this shall be only in a word of exhortation to all, especially you who bear the name of Christ by a more eminent profession of him. O beware of this soul-infection, this leprosy of the head. I hope you do not think it needless; for it is the disease of the times. This plague is begun, yea, spreads apace; not a flock, a congregation hardly, that hath not this scab among them. Paul was a preacher the best of us all may write after, and he presseth this home upon the saints; yea, in the constant course of his preaching it made a piece of his sermon, Acts xx. 30, 31; he sets us preachers also on this work; 'take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock; for I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things;' therefore watch. And then he presents his own example, that he hardly made a sermon for several years, but this was part of it, to warn every one night and day with tears. We need not prophesy what impostors may come upon the stage, when we go off; there are too many at present above board of this gang, drawing disciples after them. And if it be our duty to warn you of them, surely it is yours to watch, lest you by any of them be led into temptation this hour thereof, wherein Satan is let loose in so great a measure to deceive the nation. May you not as easily be soured with this leaven, as the disciples, whom Christ bids beware? Are you privileged above those famous churches of Galatia and Corinth, many of which were bewitched with false teachers, and in a manner turned to another gospel? Is Satan grown orthodox, or have his instruments lost their cunning, who hunt for souls? In a word, is there not a sympathy between thy corrupt heart and error? hast thou not a disposition, which, like the foams of the earth, makes it natural for these weeds to grow in thy soil? Seest thou not many prostrated by this enemy, who sat upon the mountain of their faith, and thought it should never have been removed? Surely they would have taken it ill to have been told, You are the men and women that will decry Sabbaths, which now ye count holy; you will turn Pelagians, who now defy the name; you will despise prophecy itself, who now seem so much to honour the prophets; you will throw family duties out of doors, who dare not now go out of doors, till you have prayed there. Yet these, and more than these are come to pass, and doth it not behove thee, Christian, to take heed lest thou fall also? And that thou mayest not,

First, Make it thy chief care to get a thorough change of thy heart. If once the root of the matter be in thee, and thou art bottomed by a lively faith on Christ, thou art then safe: I do not say wholly free from all error, but this I am sure, free from ingulfing thy soul in damning error. 'They went out from us,' saith St. John, 'but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us, 1 John ii. 19. As if he had said, They had some outward profession, and common work of the Spirit with us, which they have either lost or carried over to the devil's quarters, but they never had the unction of the sanctifying Spirit. By this, ver. 20, he distinguisheth them, and comforts the sincere ones, who possibly might fear their own fall by their departure: 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.' It is one thing to know a truth, and another to know it by unction. An hypocrite may do the former, the saint only the latter. It is this unction which gives the soul the savour of the knowledge of Christ: those are the fit prey for impostors, who are enlightened but not enlivened. Oh it is good to have the heart established with grace; this is an anchor will keep us from being set adrift, and carried about with divers and strange doctrines, as the apostle teacheth us, Heb. xiii. 9.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Ply the work of mortification: crucify the flesh daily. Heresy, though a spiritual sin, yet by the apostle reckoned among the deeds of the flesh, Gal. v. 20; because it is occasioned by fleshly motives, and nourished by carnal food and fuel. Never any turned heretic, but flesh was at the bottom; either they served their belly, or a lust of pride; it was the way to court, or secured their estates, and saved their lives, as sometimes the reward of truth is fire and faggot; some evil or other is in the straw when least seen, and therefore it is no wonder heresies should end in the flesh, seeing that they in a manner sprang from it. The rheum in the head ascends in fumes from the stomach, and returns thither or unto the lungs, which at last fret and ulcerate: carnal affections first send up their fumes to the understanding, clouding that, yea, bribing it, to receive such and such principles for truths, which, embraced, fall down into the life, corrupting that with the ulcer of profaneness. So that, Christian, if once thou canst break off thy engagements to the flesh, and become a free man, so as not to give thy vote to gratify thy carnal fears or hopes, thou wilt then be a sure friend to truth.

Thirdly, Wait conscionably on the ministry of the word. Satan commonly stops the ear from hearing sound doctrine, before he opens it to embrace corrupt. This is the method of souls apostatizing from truth. 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4: 'They shall turn their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.' Satan, like a cunning thief, draws the soul out of the road into some lane or corner, and there robs him of the truth. By rejecting of one ordinance, we deprive ourselves of the blessing of all other: say not that thou prayest to be led into truth: he will not hear thy prayer, if thou turnest thine ear from hearing the law. He that loves his child, when he sees him play the truant, will whip him to school: if God loves a soul, he will bring him back to the word with shame and sorrow.

Fourthly, When you hear any unusual doctrine, though never so pleasing, make not up the match hastily with it; have some better testimony of it before you open your heart to it. The apostle indeed bids us 'entertain strangers,' for some have entertained angels unawares, Heb. xiii. 3; but he would not have us carried about with 'strange doctrine,' ver. 9: by this I am sure some have entertained devils. I confess, it is not enough to reject a doctrine because strange to us, but a ground why we should wait and inquire. Paul marvelled that the Galatians were so soon removed from him, who had called them unto the grace of Christ, unto another gospel: they might, surely, have stayed till they had acquainted Paul with it, and asked his judgment. What! no sooner an impostor come into the country and open his pack, but buy all his ware at first sight! O friends, were it not more wisdom to pray such new notions over and over again, to search the word and our hearts by it, yea, not to trust our own hearts, but call in counsel from others? If your minister have not so much credit with you, get the most holy, humble, and established Christians you can find. Error is like fish, which must be eaten new, or it will stink. When those dangerous errors syrung up first in New England, O how unsettled were many of the churches! what an outcry was made, as if some mine of gold had been discovered! but in a while, when those errors came to their complexion, and it was perceived whither they were bound,—to destroy churches, ordinances, and power of godliness,—then such as feared God, who had stepped aside, returned back with shame and sorrow.

CHAPTER IX.

OF PRIDE OF GIFTS, AND HOW SATAN TEMPTS THE CHRISTIAN THERETO.

The second spiritual wickedness which Satan provokes unto, especially the saint, is spiritual pride. This was the sin which made him of a blessed angel a cursed devil; and as it was his personal sin, so he chiefly labours to derive it to the sons of men; and he so far prevailed on our first parents, that ever since this sin has and claims a kind of regency in the heart, making use both of bad and good to draw her chariot. First, of evil; pride enters into the labours of other sins; they do but work to make her brave, as subjects to uphold the state and grandeur of their prince. Thus you shall see some drudge and toil,

Digitized by Google

cheat, cozen, oppress; and what mean they? Oh, it is to get an estate to maintain their pride. Others fawn and flatter, lie, dissemble, and for what? to help pride up some mount of honour. Again, it maketh use of that which is good; it can work with God's own tools, his ordinances, by which the Holy Spirit advanced his kingdom of grace in the hearts of his saints. These often are prostituted to pride. A man may be very zealous in prayer, and painstaking in preaching, and all the while pride is the master whom he serves, though in God's livery. It can take sanctuary in the holiest actions, and hide itself under the skirt of virtue itself. Thus, while a man is exercising his charity, pride may be the idol in secret for which he lavished out his gold so freely. It is hard starving this sin; there is nothing almost but it can live on; nothing so base that a proud heart will not be lifted up with, and nothing so sacred but it will profane—even dare to drink in the bowls of the sanctuary; nay, rather than starve, it will feed on the carcases of other sins; *Difficile valde vitiatur peccatum, quod ex victoria vitiorum nascitur.* This minion pride will stir up the soul to resist, yea, in a manner kill some sins, that she may boastingly show the head of them, and blow the creature up with the conceit of himself above others; as the Pharisee, who through pride boasted that he was not as the Publican; so that pride, if not looked to, will have to do everywhere, and hath a large sphere it moves in. Nothing, indeed, without Divine assistance, the creature hath or doth, but will soon become a prey to this devourer; but I am not to handle it in its latitude. Pride is either conversant about carnal objects, as pride of beauty, strength, riches, and such like; or about spiritual: the latter we shall speak a little to. I confess for the former, possibly a saint may be caught in them; no sin to be slighted, yet not so commonly, for ordinarily pride is of those perfections which are suitable, if not proper to the state and calling we are in: thus the musician is proud of the skill he hath in his art, by which he excels others of his rank. The scholar, though he can play perhaps as well, yet is not proud of that, but looks on it as beneath him; no, he is proud of his learning and choice notions; and so of others. Now the life of a Christian, as a Christian, is superior to the life of man as a man; and therefore doth not value himself by these which are beneath him, but in higher and more raised perfections, which suit a Christian's calling. As a natural man is proud of perfections suitable to his natural estate, as honour, beauty; so the Christian is prone chiefly to be puffed up with perfections suitable to his life; I shall name three: pride of gifts, pride of grace, pride of privileges; these are the things which Satan chiefly labours to entangle him in.

SECTION I.—First, Pride of gifts. By gifts I mean those supernatural abilities, with which the Spirit of God doth enrich and endow the minds of men, for edification of the body of Christ; of which gifts the apostle tells us there is great diversity, and all from the same Spirit, 1 Cor. xii. 4. There is not greater variety of colours and qualities in plants and flowers, with which the earth like a carpet of needlework is variegated for the delight and service of man, than there is of gifts in the minds of men, natural and spiritual, to render them useful to one another, both in civil societies and Christian fellowship. The Christian, as well as man, is intended to be a sociable creature; and for the better managing of this spiritual commonwealth among Christians, God doth wisely and graciously provide and impart gifts suitable to the place every one stands in to his brethren, as the vessels are larger or less in the body natural, according to their place therein. Now Satan labours what he can to taint these gifts, and fly-blow them with pride in the Christian, that so he may spoil the Christian's trade and commerce, which is mutually maintained by the gifts and graces of one another. Pride of gifts hinders the Christian's trade, at least his thriving by their commerce, two ways.

First, Pride of gifts is the cause why we do so little good with them to others.

Secondly, Why we receive so little good from the gifts of others.

First, Pride of gifts hinders the doing of good by them to others, and that upon a threefold account.

First, Pride diverts a man from aiming at that end; so far as pride prevails, the man prays, preaches, &c., rather to be thought good by others; rather to

Digitized by Google

enthrone himself than Christ, in the opinion and hearts of his hearers. Pride carries the man aloft to be admired for the height of his parts and notions, and will not suffer him to stoop so low as to speak of plain truths, or, if he does, not plainly; he must have some fine lace, though on a plain stuff; such a one may tickle the ear, but very unlikely to do real good to souls; alas! it is not that he intends.

Secondly, If this painted Jezebel of pride be perceived to look out at the window in any exercise, whether of preaching, prayer, or conference, it doth beget a disdain in the spirits of those that hear such a one, both good and bad. It is a sin very odious to a gracious heart, and often makes the stomach go against the food, though good, through their abhorence of that pride they see in the instrument. It is indeed their weakness; but wo to them that by their pride lead them into temptation; nay, those that are bad, and may be in the same kind, like not that in another, which they favour in themselves, and so prejudiced, return as bad as they went.

Thirdly, Pride of gifts rob us of God's blessing in the use of them. The humble man may have Satan at his right hand to oppose him; but be sure the proud man shall find God himself there to resist him, whenever he goes about any duty. God proclaims so much, and would have the proud man know whenever he meets him he will oppose him. 'He resists the proud.' Great gifts are beautiful as Rachel, but pride makes them also barren, like her: either we must lay self aside, or God will lay us aside,

Secondly, Pride of gifts hinders the receiving of good from others. Pride fills the soul, and a full soul will take nothing from God, much less from man, to do it good. Such a one is very dainty: it is not every sermon, though wholesome food, nor every prayer, though savoury, will go down; he must have a choice dish; he thinks he hath better than this of his own: and is such a one like to get good? And truly we may see it, that as the plain ploughman that can eat of any homely food, if wholesome, hath more health, and is able to do more work in a day, than many enjoy or can do in their whole life, that are nice, squeamish, and courtly in their fare; so the humble Christian, that can feed on plain truths, and ordinances, which have not so much of the art of man to commend them to their palate, enjoy more of God, than the nicer sort of professors, who are all to be served in a lordly dish of rare gifts. The church of Corinth was famous for gifts above other churches, 1 Cor. i., but not in grace; none so charged for weakness in that; 1 Cor, iii. 2, he calls them 'carnal, babes in Christ;' so weak, as not able to digest man's meat; 'I have fed you', saith Paul, 'with milk and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet are ye now able.' Why? what is the matter? The reason lies, ver. 3: 'Ye are carnal; there is among you envy and strife.' Ver. 4: 'One saith, I am of Paul; another I am of Apollos.' Pride makes them take parts, and make sides, one for this preacher, another for that, as they fancied one to excel another. And this is not the way to thrive. Pride destroys love, and love wanting edification is lost. The devil hath made foul work in the church by this engine. Zanchy tells of one in Geneva, who, being desired to go to hear Viretus, that preached at the same time with Calvin, answered his friend, 'If Paul were to preach, *relicto Paulo Calvinum audirem*, I would leave Paul himself to hear Calvin.' And will pride in the gifts of another so far transport, even to the borders of blasphemy? what work then will pride make when the gifts are a man's own!

SECTION II.—*Use* 1. Doth Satan thus stir up saints to this spiritual pride of gifts? First, Here is a word to you that have mean gifts, yet truth of grace: be content with thy condition. Perhaps when thou hearest others, how enlargedly they pray, how able to discourse of the truths of God, and the like, thou art ready to go into a corner, and mourn to think how weak thy memory, how dull thy apprehension, how straitened thy spirit, hardly able, though in secret, to utter and express thy mind to God in prayer. O thou art ready to think those the happy men and women, and almost murmur at thy condition; well, canst thou not say, Though I have not words, I hope I have faith; I cannot dispute for the truth, but I am willing to suffer for it: I cannot remember a sermon; but I never heard the word, but I hate sin and love Christ more than

Digitized by Google

ever? Lord, thou knowest I love thee. Truly, Christian, thou hast the better part; thou little thinkest what a mercy may be wrapped up even in the meanest of thy gifts, or what temptations their gifts expose them to, which, God, for aught I know, may in mercy deny thee. Joseph's coat made him finer than his brethren, but this caused all his trouble: this set the archers a shooting their arrows into his side: thus great gifts lift a saint up a little higher in the eyes of men, but it occasions many temptations which thou meetest not with that art kept low; what with envy from their brethren, malice from Satan, and pride in their own hearts, I dare say none find so hard a work to go to heaven as such; much ado to bear up against those waves and winds, while thou creepest along the shore under the wind to heaven. It is with such, as with some great lord of little estate; a meaner man oft hath money in his purse, when he hath none, and can lend his lordship some at a time of need. Great gifts and parts are titles of honour among men, but many such may come and borrow grace and comfort of a mean-gifted brother; possibly the preacher of his poor neighbour. O, poor Christian! do not murmur or envy them, but rather pity and pray for them; they need it more than others: his gifts are thine, thy grace is for thyself: thou art like a merchant that hath his factor go to sea, but he hath his adventure without hazard brought home. Thou joinest with him in prayer, hast the help of his gifts, but not the temptation of his pride.

Use 2. Secondly, Doth Satan labour thus to draw to pride of gifts? This speaks a word to thee to whom God hath given more gifts than ordinary; beware of pride, that is now thy snare. Satan is at work; if possible he will turn thy artillery against thyself; thy safety lies in thy humility; if this lock be cut, the legions of hell are on thee. Remember whom thou wrestlest with,—spiritual wickedness: and their play is to lift up, that they may give the sorer fall. Now the more to stir up thy heart against it, I shall add some soul-humbling considerations.

First, Consider these spiritual gifts are not thy own; and wilt thou be proud of another's bounty? Is not God the founder, and can he not soon be the confounder of thy gifts? Thou art proud of thy gourd, what wilt thou be when it is gone? Surely then thou wilt be peevish and angry; and truly thou takest the course to be stripped of them. Gifts come on other terms than grace. God gives grace as a freehold: it hath the promise of this and another world: but gifts come on liking; though a father will not cast off his child, yet he may take away his fine coat and ornaments, if proud of them.

Secondly, Gifts are not merely for thyself. As the light of the sun is ministerial, it shines not for itself; so all thy gifts are for others: 'gifts for the edifying of the body.' Suppose a man should leave a chest of money in your hands to be distributed to others; what folly is it in this man to put this into his own inventory, and applaud himself that he hath so much money! Poor soul! thou art but God's executor, and by that time thou hast paid all the legacies, thou wilt see little left for thee to brag and boast of.

Thirdly, Know, Christian, thou shalt be accountable for these talents. Now with what face can a proud soul look on God? Suppose one left an executor to pay legacies, and this man should pay them, not as legacies of another, but gifts of his own. Christ at his ascension gave gifts, that his children should receive; thou hast some in thy hand; now a proud soul gives out all not as the legacy of Christ, but as his own; he assumes all to himself. O, how abominable is this, to entitle ourselves to Christ's honours!

Fourthly, Thy gifts commend thee not to God. Man may be taken with thy expression and notion in prayer; but these are all pared off when thy prayer comes before God. 'O woman,' saith Christ, 'great is thy faith!' not, polite and flourishing thy language. It were good after our duties, to sort the ingredients of which they are made up, what grace contributed, and what gifts, and what pride; and when all the heterogeneal stuff is severed, you shall see in what a little compass the actings of grace in our duties will lie.

Fifthly, Consider, while thou art priding in thy gifts, thou art dwindling and withering in thy grace. Such are like corn that runs up much into straw, whose ear commonly is but light and thin. Grace is too much neglected, where gifts are too highly prized; we are commanded to be clothed with

Digitized by Google

humility. Our garments cover the shame of our bodies, humility the beauty of the soul; and as a tender body cannot live without clothes, so neither can grace without this clothing of humility. It kills the spirit of praise: when thou shouldst bless God, thou art applauding thyself. It destroys Christian love, and stabs our fellowship with the saints to the heart: a proud man hath not room enough to walk in company, because the gifts of others he thinks stand in his way. Pride so distempers the palate, that it can relish nothing that is drawn from another's vessel.

Sixthly, It is the forerunner of some great sin, or some great affliction. God will not suffer such a weed as pride to grow in his garden, without taking some course or other to root it up; it may be he will let thee fall into some great sin, and that shall bring thee home with shame. God useth sometimes a thorn in the flesh, to prick the bladder of pride in the spirit; or at least some great affliction, the very end whereof is 'to hide pride from man,' Job. xxxiii. 17, 18; as you do with your hot-metalled horses, ride them over ploughed lands to tame them, and then you can sit safely on their backs. If God's honour be in danger through thy pride, then expect a rod, and most likely the affliction shall be in that which will be most grievous to thee, in the thing thou art proud of. Hezekiah boasted of his treasures, God sends the Chaldeans to plunder him; Jonah was fond of his gourd, and that is smitten: and if thy spirit be blown up with the pride of gifts; thou art in danger of having them blasted, at least in the opinion of others, whose breath of applause, possibly, was a means to overset thy unballasted spirit.

Section III.—*Quest.* But how would you direct us against this?

Answ. Arguments you have had before. I shall only therefore point to two or three doors, where your enemy comes forth upon you; and surely the very sight thereof, if thou art loyal to Christ, will stir thee up to fall upon it.

First, Pride discovers itself in dwelling upon the thoughts of our gifts, with a secret kind of content to see our own face, till at last we fall in love with it. We read of some, whose 'eyes are full of the adulteress, and cannot cease from sin;' a proud heart is full of himself; his own abilities cast their shadow before him; they are in his eye wherever he goes; the great subject and theme of his thoughts is, what he is, and what he hath above others, applauding himself, as Bernard confesseth, that (when one would think he had little leisure for such thoughts) even in preaching pride would be whispering in his ear, *Bene fecisti, Bernarde*, O well done, Bernard. Now, have a care, Christian, of chatting with such company. Run from such thoughts as from a bear. If the devil can get thee to stand on this pinnacle, while he presents thee with the glory of thy spiritual attainments and endowments for thee to gaze on them, thy weak head will soon turn round in pride; and therefore labour to keep the sense of thy own infirmities lively in thy soul, to divert the temptation: as those who are subject to some kind of fits, carry about them things proper for the disease, that when the fit is coming (which oft is occasioned with a sweet perfume) they may use them for their help. Sweet scents are not more dangerous for them, than anything that may applaud thee is to thy soul. Have a care, therefore, not only of wearing such thoughts in thy own bosom, but also of sitting by others that bring the sweet scent of thy perfections to thee by their flattery.

Secondly, This kind of pride appears in a forwardness to oppose itself to view. David's brethren were mistaken in him indeed, 1 Sam xvii. 18; but oft the pride and naughtiness of the heart breaks out at this door. Christ's carnal friends bid Christ shew himself; pride loves to climb up, not as Zaccheus, to see Christ, but to be seen himself. 'The fool,' Solomon tells us, 'hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself,' Prov. xviii. 2. Pride would be somebody, and therefore comes abroad to court the multitude; whereas humility delights in privacy, as the leaves do cover and shade the fruits, that some hand must gently lift them up before they can see the fruit: so should humility and a holy modesty conceal the perfections of the soul, till a hand of providence by some call invites them out. There is a pride in naked gifts, as well as in naked breasts and backs: humility is a necessary veil to all other graces; and, therefore, first, Christian, look whenever thou comest forth to public duty, that thou hast a call: it is obedience to be ready to answer when God calls

Digitized by Google

thee forth; but it is pride to run before God speaks. Secondly, when called, earnestly implore Divine strength against this enemy; shun not a duty for fear of pride; thou mayest show it in the very seeming to escape it; but go in the strength of God against it; there is more hope of overcoming it by obedience than disobedience.

Thirdly, In envying the gifts of others, when they seem to blind our own, that they are not so fair a prospect as we desire. This is a weed which may grow too rank in a good soil. Aaron and Miriam could not bear Moses's honour, Numb. xii. 1. That was the business, though they picked a quarrel with him about his wife (because an Ethiopian), as appears plainly, ver. 2: 'Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not also spoken by us?' They thought Moses went away with too much of the honour, and did repine that God should use him more than themselves. And it is observable, that the lusting for flesh broke out among the mixed multitude and baser sort of people (Numb. xi. 4, 5), but this of pride and envy took fire in the bosoms of the most eminent for place and piety. O, what need then have we, poor creatures, to watch our hearts, when we see such precious servants of God led into temptation! 'The spirit that dwelleth in us, lusteth to envy,' Jam. iv. 5. Our corrupt nature is ever putting on to this sin. It is as hard to keep our hearts and this sin asunder, as it is to hinder two lovers from meeting together. Thatch is not more ready to be fired with every flash of lightning, than the heart to be kindled at the shining forth of any excelling gift or grace in another. It was one of the first windows that corrupt nature looked out at, a sin that shed the first blood; Cain's envy hatched Abel's murder. Now if ever thou meanest to get the mastery of this sin,

First, Call in help from heaven. No sooner hath the apostle set forth how big and teeming full the heart of man is with envy, but he shows where a fountain of grace is infinitely exceeding that of lust; 'the spirit within us lusteth to envy, but he giveth more grace,' ver. 5. And therefore sit not down tamely under this sin; it is not unconquerable. God can give thee more grace than thou hast sin, more humility than thou hast pride. Be but so humble as cordially to beg his grace, and thou shalt not be so proud as wickedly to envy his gifts or grace in others.

Secondly, Make this sin as black and ugly as thou canst possibly to thy thought, that when it is presented to thee, thou mayest abhor it the more. Indeed there needs no more than its own face (wouldst thou look wistly on it), to make thee out of love with it. For first, this envying of others' gifts casts great contempt upon God, and that more ways than one.

First, When thou enviest the gifts of thy brethren, thou takest upon thee to teach God what he shall give, and to whom; as if the great God should take counsel or ask leave of thee before he dispenseth his gifts: and darest thou stand to thy own envious thoughts with this interpretation? Such a one thou findest Christ himself give, Matt. xx. 15: 'Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?' As if Christ had said, What hath any to do to cavil at my disposal of what is not theirs, but mine to give?

Secondly, Thou malignest the goodness of God. It troubles thee, it seems, that God hath a heart to do good to any besides thyself; thy eye is evil because his is good. Wouldst not thou have God be good? you had as good speak out and say, You would not have him good; he can as soon cease to be God, as to be good.

Thirdly, Thou art an enemy to the glory of God, as thou defacest that which should set it forth. Every gift is a ray of Divine excellency: and as all the beams declare the glory of the sun, so all the gifts God imparts declare the glory of God; now envy labours to deface and sully the representations of God; it hath ever something to disparage the excellency of another withal. God showed Miriam her sin by her punishment: she went to bespatter Moses, that shone so eminently with the gifts and graces of God, and God spits in her face, (Num. xii.) yea, fills her all over with a noisome scab. Dost thou cordially wish well to the honour of God? why then hangest thou thy head, and dost not rather rejoice to see him glorified by the gifts of others? Could a heathen take it so well, when himself was passed by, and others chosen to places of honour

Digitized by Google

and government, that he said, He was glad his city could find so many more worthy than himself? And shall a Christian repine that any are found fit to honour God beside himself?

Secondly, Thou wrongest thy brother, as thou sinnest against the law of love, which obligeth thee to rejoice in his good as thy own, yea, to prefer him in honour before thyself. Thou canst not love and envy the same person; envy is as contrary to love, as the hectical feverish fire in the body is to the kindly heat of nature. 'Charity envieth not,' 1 Cor. xiii. How can it, when it lives where it loves? and when thou ceasest to love, thou beginnest to hate and kill him; and dost not thou tremble to be found a murderer at last?

Thirdly, Thou consultest worst of all for thyself. God is out of thy reach; what thou spittest against heaven, thou art sure to have fall on thy own face at last; and thy brother whom thou enviest, God stands bound to defend him against thy envy, because he is maligned for what he hath of God in him. Thus did God plead Joseph's cause against his envious brethren, and David's against wicked Saul. Thyself only hast real hurt.

First, Thou deprivest thyself of what thou mightest reap from the gifts of others. That old saying is true, *Tolle invidiam, mea tua sunt, et tua mea:* 'What thou hast is mine, and what I have thine, when envy is gone.' Whereas now, like the leech (which they say draws out the worst blood) thou suckest nothing but what swells thy mind with discontent, and is after vomited out in strife and contention. O what a sad thing it is, that one should go from a precious sermon, a sweet prayer, and bring nothing away but a grudge against the instrument God used, as we see in the Pharisees and others at Christ's preaching.

Secondly, Thou robbest thyself of the joy of thy life: 'He that is cruel, troubles his own flesh,' Prov. xi. 17. The envious man doth it to purpose; he sticks the honour and esteem of others as thorns in his own heart; he cannot think of them without pain and anguish, and he must needs pine that is ever in pain.

Thirdly, Thou throwest thyself into the mouth of temptation; thou needest give the devil no greater advantage; it is a stock any sin almost will grow upon. What will not the patriarchs do to rid their hands of Joseph, whom they envied? That very pride which made them disdain the thought of bowing to his sheaf, made them stoop far lower, even to debase themselves as low as hell, and be the devil's instruments to sell their dear brother into slavery, which might have been worse to him (if God had not provided otherwise) than if they had slain him on the place. What an impotent and cruel mind did Saul shew against David, when once envy had envenomed his heart? From that day on which he heard David preferred in the women's songs above himself, he could never get that sound out of his head, but did ever devote this innocent man to death in his thoughts, who had done him no other wrong but in being an instrument to keep the crown on his head, by the hazard of his own life with Goliath. O it is a bloody sin; it is the womb wherein a whole litter of other sins are formed! Rom. i. 29, 'Full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity,' &c.; and therefore, except you be resolved to bid the devil welcome, and his whole train, resist him in this, that comes before to take up quarters for the rest.

CHAPTER X.

OF PRIDE OF GRACE.

Secondly, Pride of grace. This is another way Satan assaults the Christian. It is true, grace cannot be proud, yet it is possible a saint may be proud of his grace; there is nothing the Christian hath or doth, but this worm of pride will breed in it. The world we live in is corruptible, and all here is subject to putrify, as things kept in a rafty, muggish room are subject to mould. It is not the nature of grace, but the salt of the covenant that keeps and preserves the purity of it; in heaven indeed we shall be safe. But how can a saint be said to be proud of his grace? Then a soul is proud of his grace when he trusts in his grace. Trust and confidence is an incommunicable flower of God's crown, as sovereign Lord; even among men it goes along with royalty. Set up a king, and as such

Digitized by Google

he expects you should give him this, as the undoubted prerogative of his place; and therefore to seek protection from any other, is, as it were, to set up another king: Judg. xix. 15, 'If indeed you anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust under my shadow.' Therefore, when a soul puts his trust in any thing beside God, he sets up a prince, a king, an idol, to which he gives God's glory away. Now it doth not make the sin less, that it is the grace of God we crown, than if it were a lust we crowned. It is idolatry to worship a holy angel, as well as a cursed devil: to make our grace our god, as well as our belly our god; nay, rather, it adds to it, because that is now used to rob him of his glory which should have brought him in the greatest revenue of glory: certainly the more treasure you put into your servant's hands, the greater wrong to you for him to run away with it. I doubt not but David could have borne it better to have seen a Philistine drive him from his throne, than a son, an Absalom. But how can or may a saint be said to trust in his grace?

First, By trusting to the strength of his grace.

Secondly, By trusting on the worth of his grace. Indeed a professed trust in grace, I conceive cannot stand with grace; but there is an oblique kind of trust, or that which by interpretation may savour of it. Satan is sly in his assaults.

SECTION I.—First, of the first: To trust in the strength of grace is to be proud of grace. This is opposed to that poverty of spirit so commended by our Saviour, Matt. v., by which a man lives in the continual sense of his spiritual beggary and nothingness, and so hath his recourse to Christ, as the poor to the rich man's door, knowing he hath nothing at home to maintain him. Such a one was Paul, not able to do anything of himself; he is not ashamed to let the world know that Christ carries his purse for him. 'Our sufficiency is of God;' yea, after many years' trading, this holy man sees nothing he hath got, Phil. iii. 13: 'I count not myself to have apprehended;' he is still pressing forward. Ask him how he lives, he will tell you who keeps house for him: 'I live, yet not I,' Gal. ii. 20: as ask a beggar where he hath his meat, clothes, &c., he will say, 'I thank my good master.' Now Satan chiefly labours to puff the soul up with an overweening conceit of his own ability, as the readiest means to bring him into his snare: Satan knows it is God's method to give his children into his hands, when once they grow proud and self-confident: Hezekiah was left to a temptation, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31, 'to try him.' Why, God had tried him to purpose a little before in affliction: what needs this? O! Hezekiah's heart was lifted up after his affliction. It was time for God to let the tempter alone a little to foil him: probably now Hezekiah had high thoughts of his grace; O! he would never do as he had done before, and God will let him see what a weak creature he is. Peter makes a whip for his own back in that bravado, 'Though all should forsake thee, yet will not I.' Christ now, in mere mercy, must set Satan on him, to lay him on his back, that, seeing the weakness of his faith, he might be dismounted from the height of his pride. All that I shall say from this is, to entreat thee, Christian, to have a care of this kind of pride. You know what Joab said to David, when he perceived his heart lift up with the strength of his kingdom, and therefore would have the people numbered: 'The Lord God add unto thy people, how many soever they be, a hundredfold; but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?' 2 Sam. xxiv. 3. The Lord add to the strength of thy grace a hundredfold, but why delightest thou in this? Why shouldst thou be lift up? Is it not grace? Shall the groom be proud because he rides on his master's horse? or the mud wall because the sun shines on it? Mayest thou not say of every dram of grace, as the young man of his hatchet, 'Alas! master, it is borrowed;' nay, not only borrowed, but thou canst not use it without his skill and strength that lends it thee. O beware of this; let not those vain thoughts lodge in thee, lest thou enter into temptation. It is a breach a whole troop of sins may enter at, yea will, except speedily filled up.

First, It will make thee soon grow loose and negligent in thy duty. It is a sense of insufficiency that keeps a soul at work, to pray and hear, as want in the house and hutch holds up the market; no man comes thither to buy what he hath at home. 'Up,' saith Jacob, 'go down to Egypt for corn, that we live and not die.' Thus saith the needy Christian, Up, soul, to thy God; thy faith

Digitized by Google

is weak, thy patience almost spent; ply thee to the throne of grace, go with thy homer to the ordinances, and get some supplies. Now a soul conceited of his store hath another song, 'Soul, take thine ease, thou art richly laid up for many days.' Let the doubting soul pray, thy faith is strong; let the weak lie at the breast, thou art well grown up; nay, it is well if it goes not further to a despising of ordinances, except they have some more courtly fare than ordinary: such a pass were the Corinthians come to, 1 Cor. iv. 8: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye reign like kings without us.' I pray observe how he lays the accent on the particle *now*; 'now ye are rich,' as if he had said, I knew the time, if Paul had been come to town, and news spread abroad in the city that Paul was to preach, you would have flocked to hear him, and blessed God for the season; but then ye were poor and empty; now ye are full, you have got to a higher attainment; Paul is a plain fellow now, he may carry his cheer to a hungry people, if he will; we are well supplied. And when once the heart is come to this, it is easy to judge what will follow.

Secondly, This trusting to the strength of grace will make the soul bold and venturous. The humble Christian is the wary Christian; he knows his weakness, and this makes him afraid. I have a weak head, saith he; I may be soon disputed into an error and heresy, and therefore I dare not come where such stuff is broached, lest my weak head should be intoxicated. The confident man will sip of every cup—he fears none; no, he is established in the truth, a whole team of heretics shall not draw him aside. I have a vain, light heart, saith the humble soul: I dare not come among wicked, debauched company, lest I should at last bring the naughty man home with me; but the other, on trusting to the strength of his grace, dares venture into the devil's quarters. Thus Peter into the rout of Christ's enemies; and how he came off you know; there his faith had been slain on the place, had not Christ sounded a retreat, by the seasonable look of love he gave him. Indeed I have read of some bragging philosophers, who did not think it enough to be temperate, except they had the object for intemperance present; and therefore they would go into taverns and mix with bad company, as if they meant to beat the devil on his own ground; but the Christian knows an enemy nearer at hand, which they were ignorant of; and that he need not go over his own threshold to challenge the devil. He hath lust in his bosom that will be hard enough for him all his days, without giving it the vantage of ground. Christian, I know no sin which thou mayest not be left to commit, except one. It was a bold speech of him, and yet a good man, as I have heard; 'If Clapham die of the plague, say Clapham hath no faith;' and this made him boldly go among the infected. If a Christian, thou shalt not die of spiritual plagues, yet such may have the plague sores of gross sins running on them for a time, and is not this sad enough? Therefore walk humbly with thy God.

Thirdly, This high conceit of the strength of thy grace will make thee cruel and churlish to thy weak brethren in their infirmities, a sin that least becomes a saint; Gal. vi. 1, 'If any one be overtaken, you that be spiritual restore such a one with meekness.' But how shall a soul get such a meek spirit? It follows, 'considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.' What makes men hard to the poor? They think they shall never be so themselves. Why are many so sharp in their censures, but because they trust too much to their grace, as if they could never fall? O you are in the body, and the body of sin in you, therefore, fear. Bernard used to say, when he heard any scandalous sin of a professor, *Hodie illi, cras mihi.* He fell to-day; I may stumble to-morrow.

SECTION II.—The second way a soul may be proud of his grace, is by resting on it for his acceptance with God. The Scripture calls inherent grace 'our own righteousness,' though God indeed be the efficient of it, and opposeth it to the righteousness of Christ, which alone is called 'the righteousness of God,' Rom. x. 1. Now, to rest on any grace inherent, is to exalt our own righteousness above the righteousness of God; and what pride will this amount to? If this were so, then a saint, when he comes to heaven, might say, This is heaven which I have built, my grace hath purchased; and thus the God of heaven should become tenant to his creature in heaven. No, God hath cast the order of our salvation into another method of grace, but not of grace in us, but grace to us. Inherent grace hath its place and office to accompany

Digitized by Google

salvation, Heb. vi. 9, but not procure it. This is Christ's work, not the work of grace. When Israel waited on the Lord at Mount Sinai, they had their bounds: not a man must come up besides Moses to treat with God; no, not touch the Mount lest they die; thus all the graces of the Spirit wait on God, but none come up to challenge any acceptance of God besides faith, which is a grace that presents the soul not in its own garments. But you will say, What needs all this? where is the man that trusts in his grace? Alas! where is the Christian that doth fully stand clear, and freely come off by his own righteousness? He is a rare pilot indeed that can steer his faith in so direct a course, as not now and then to knock upon his duty, and run on ground upon that grace. Abraham went in to Hagar, and the children of Abraham's faith are not perfectly dead to the law, and may be found sometimes in Hagar's arms: witness the flux and reflux of our faith, according to the various aspect of our obedience; when this seems full, then our faith is at a spring-tide, and covers all the mountains of our fears; but let it seem to wane in any service or duty, then the Jordan of our faith flies back, and leaves the soul naked. The devil's spite is at Christ, and therefore since he could not hinder his landing, which he endeavoured all he could, nor work his will on his person when he was come, he goes now in a more refined way to darken the glory of his sufferings, and the sufficiency of his righteousness, by blending ours with his: the doctrine of justification by faith hath had more works and batteries made against it, than any other in the Scripture. Indeed, many other errors were but his sly approaches to get nearer to undermine this; and lastly, when he cannot hide this truth, which now shines in the church like the sun in its strength, then he labours to hinder the practical improvement of it, that we, if he can help it, shall not live up to our own principles; making us, at the same time, that in our judgment we profess acceptance only through Christ, in our practice confute ourselves. Now there is a double pride in the soul which he makes use of for this end; the one I may call a mannerly pride, the other a self-applauding pride.

First, A mannerly pride, which comes forth in the habit and guise of humility; and that discovers itself, either at the soul's first coming to Christ, and keeps him from closing with the promise, or afterwards in the daily course of a Christian's walking with God, which keeps him from comfortably living on Christ.

First, When a poor soul is starved off the promise by the sense of his own unworthiness and great unrighteousness; tell him of a pardon—alas! he is so wrapped up with the thoughts of his own vileness, that you cannot fasten it upon him. What! will God ever take such a toad as he is into his bosom, discount so many great abominations at once, and receive him into his favour, that hath been so long in rebellious arms against him? he cannot believe it; no, though he hears what Christ hath done and suffered for sin, he refuseth to be comforted. Little doth the soul think what a bitter root such thoughts spring from; thou thinkest thou dost well, thus to declaim against thyself, and aggravate thy sins; indeed, thou canst not paint them black enough, or entertain too low and base thoughts of thyself for them; but what wrong hath God and Christ done thee, that thou shouldst so unworthily reflect upon the mercy of the one, and the merit of the other? Mayest thou not do this, and be tender of the good name of God also? Is there no way to shew thy sense of thy sin except thou asperse thy Saviour? Canst thou not charge thyself, but thou must condemn God, and put Christ and his blood to shame before Satan, who triumphs more in this than in all thy other sins? In a word, though thou like a wretch hast undone thyself, and damned thy soul by thy sins, yet art thou not willing God should have the glory of pardoning them, and Christ the honour of procuring the same? Or art thou like him in the gospel, Luke xvi. 3, 'who could not dig, and to beg was ashamed?' Thou canst not earn heaven by thine own righteousness, and is thy spirit so stout that thou wilt not beg it for Christ's sake, yea, take it at God's hands, who in the gospel comes a begging to thee, and beseecheth thee to be reconciled to him? Ah, soul, who would ever have thought there could have lain such pride under such a modest veil? And yet none like it. It is horrible pride for a beggar to starve, rather than take an alms at a rich man's hands; a malefactor rather to choose his halter, than a

Digitized by Google

pardon from his gracious prince's hand: but here is one infinitely surpassing both; a soul pining and perishing in sin, and yet rejecting the mercy of God, and the helping hand of Christ to save him. Though Abigail did not think herself worthy to be David's wife, yet she thought David was worthy of her, and therefore she humbly accepted his offer, and makes haste to go with the messengers: that is the sweet frame of heart indeed, to lie low in the sense of your own vileness, yet to believe; to renounce all conceit of worthiness in ourselves, yet not therefore to renounce all hope of mercy, but the more speedily to make haste to Christ that woes us. All the pride and unmannerliness lies in making Christ stay for us, who bids his messengers invite poor sinners to come, and tell them 'all things are ready.' But may be thou wilt say still, it is not pride that keeps thee off, but thou canst not believe that God will ever entertain such as thou art Truly, thou mendest the matter but little with this; either thou keepest some lust in thy heart, which thou wilt not part with to obtain the benefit of the promise, and then thou art a notorious hypocrite, who, under such an outcry, for thy sins, canst drive a secret trade with hell at the same time; or if not so, thou dost discover the more pride in that thou darest stand out, when thou hast nothing to oppose against the many plain and clear promises of the gospel, but thy peremptory unbelief. God bids the wicked forsake his ways, and turn to him, and promises he will abundantly pardon him; but thou sayest, thou canst not believe this for thy own self. Now who speaks the truth? one of you two must be the liar; either thou must take it with shame to thyself, for what thou hast said against God and his promise, and that is thy best course; or thou must proudly, yea, blasphemously cast it upon God, as every unbeliever doth, 1 John v 10. Nay, thou makest him foresworn, for God (to give poor sinners the greater security in flying for refuge to Christ, who is that hope set before them, Heb. vi. 17, 18,) hath sworn they should have strong consolation; *O beatos quorum causa Deus jurat! O miserrimos si nec juranti credamus!*— Tertull. de Pœnit. O happy we, for whose sake God puts himself under an oath; but O miserable we, who will not believe God, no, not when he swears.

Secondly, When the soul hath shot the great gulf, and got into a state of peace and life by closing with Christ, yet this mannerly pride Satan makes use of, in the Christian's daily course of duty and obedience, to disturb him, and hinder his peace and comfort. O how uncheerfully, yea, joylessly, do many precious souls pass their days! If you inquire what is the cause, you shall find all their joy runs out at the crannies of their imperfect duties, and weak graces; they cannot pray as they would, and walk as they desire, with evenness and constancy: they see how short they fall of the holy rule in the word, and the pattern which others more eminent in grace do set before them; and this, though it doth not make them throw the promises away, and quite renounce all hope of Christ, yet it begets many sad fears and suspicions, yea, makes them sit at the feast Christ hath provided, and not know whether they may eat or not. In a word, as it robs them of their joy, so it robs Christ of that glory which he should receive from their rejoicing in him. I do not say, Christian, thou oughtest not to mourn for those defects thou findest in thy graces and duties; nay, thou couldst not approve thyself to be sincere, if thou didst not. A gracious heart, seeing how far short his renewed state, for the present, falls of man's primitive holiness by creation, cannot but weep and mourn, as the Jews to behold the second temple; yet, Christian, even while the tears are in thy eyes for thy imperfect graces, (for a soul riseth with his grave-clothes on,) thou shouldst rejoice, yea, triumph over all these thy defects by faith in Christ, 'in whom thou art complete,' Col. i. 10, while imperfect in thyself. Christ's presence in the second temple, which the first had not, made it, though comparatively mean, more glorious than the first, Hag. ii. 9. How much more doth his presence in this spiritual temple of a gracious heart, imputing his righteousness to cover all its uncomeliness, make the soul glorious above man at first? This is a garment for which, as Christ saith of the lily, we neither spin nor toil; yet Adam, in all his created royalty, was not so clad as the weakest believer is with this on his soul. Now, Christian, consider well what thou dost, while thou sittest languishing under the sense of thy own weakness, and refusest to rejoice in Christ, and live comfortably on the sweet privileges thou art interested in by thy marriage to him. Dost thou not bewray

Digitized by Google

some of this spiritual pride working in thee? O! if thou couldst pray without wandering, walk without limping, believe without wavering, then thou couldst rejoice and walk cheerfully. It seems, soul, thou stayest to bring the ground of thy comfort with thee, and not to receive it purely from Christ. O how much better were it if thou wouldst say with David. 'Though my house (my heart) be not so with God, yet he hath made with me a covenant ordered in all things and sure;' and this is all my desire, all my confidence: Christ I oppose to all my sins, Christ to all wants; he is my all in all, and all above all! Indeed, all those complaints of our wants and weaknesses, so far as they withdraw our hearts from relying cheerfully on Christ, they are but the language of pride hankering after the covenant of works. O it is hard to forget our mother-tongue, which is so natural to us! labour therefore to be sensible of it, how grievous it is to the Spirit of Christ. What would a husband say, if his wife, instead of expressing her love to him, and delight in him, should, day and night, do nothing but weep and cry to think of her former husband that is dead? The law as a covenant, and Christ, are compared to two husbands, Rom. vii. 4: 'Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead.' Now thy sorrow for the defect of thy own righteousness, when it hinders thy rejoicing in Christ, is but a whining after thy other husband: and this Christ cannot but take unkindly, that thou art not as well pleased to lie in the bosom of Christ, and have thy happiness from him, as with your old husband the law.

Secondly, A self-applauding pride, when the heart is secretly lift up, so as to promise itself acceptation at God's hands, for any duty or act of obedience it performs, and doth not, when most assisted, go out of his own actings, to lay the weight of his expectation entirely upon Christ; every such glance of the soul's eye is adulterous, yea, idolatrous. If thy heart, Christian, at any time be secretly enticed, as Job saith of another kind of idolatry, or thy mouth doth kiss thy hand; that is, doat so far on thy own duties or righteousness, as to give them this inward worship of thy confidence and trust: this is a great iniquity indeed: for, in this thou deniest the God that is above, who had determined thy faith to another object. Thou comest to open heaven's gate with the old key, when God hath set on a new lock. Dost thou not acknowledge that thy first entrance into thy justified state was of pure mercy? Thou wast 'justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ,' Rom. vii. 24. And whom art thou beholden to, now thou art reconciled, for thy further acceptance in every duty or holy action? to thy duty, thy obedience, thyself, or Christ? The same apostle will tell you, Rom. v. 2: 'By whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.' If Christ should not lead thee in, and all thou doest, thou art sure to find the door shut upon thee; there is no more place for desert now thou art gracious, than when thou wast graceless, Rom. i. 17. 'The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, for the just shall live by faith.' We are not only made alive by Christ, but we live by Christ: faith sucks in continual pardoning, assisting, comforting mercy from him, as the lungs suck in the air. Heaven's way is paved with grace and mercy to the end.

Use. Be exhorted, above all, to watch against this plea of Satan. Beware thou restest not in thy own righteousness: thou standest under a tottering wall: the very cracks thou seest in thy graces and duties, when best, bid thee stand off, except thou wouldst have them fall on thy head. The greatest step to heaven is out of our own doors, over our own threshold. It hath cost many a man his life, when his house was on fire, a covetousness to save some of the stuff, which venturing among the flames to preserve, they have perished themselves: more have lost their souls by thinking to carry some of their own stuff with them to heaven, such a good work or duty, which they, like lingering Lot, have been loath to leave in point of confidence, have themselves perished. O sirs, come out, come out; leave what is your own in the fire; flee to Christ naked; he hath clothing for you better than your own. Flee poor to Christ, and he hath gold, not like thine, which will consume, and be found drossy in the fire; but such as hath, in the fiery trial, passed in God's righteous judgment for pure and full weight. You cannot be found in two places at once; choose whether you will be found in your own righteousness or in Christ's. Those who have had

Digitized by Google

more to shew than thyself, have thrown away all and gone a begging to Christ. Read Paul's inventory, Phil. iii. what he had, what he did, yet all dross and loss: give him Christ, and take the rest who will. So Job as holy a man as trod on earth, (God himself being witness,) yet saith, 'Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my own soul; I would despise my life,' Job ix. 21. He had acknowledged his imperfection before; now he makes a supposition (indeed *quod non est supponendum*:) If I were perfect, yet would I not know my own soul; I would not entertain any such thoughts as should puff me up into such a confidence of my holiness, at to make it my plea with God. Like to our common phrase, we say, Such a one hath excellent parts, but he knows it; that is, he is proud of it. Take heed of knowing thy own grace in this sense; thou canst not give a greater wound both to thy grace and comfort, than by thus priding thyself in it.

SECTION III.—First, Thy grace cannot thrive so long as thou thus restest on it. A legal spirit is no friend to grace: nay, a bitter enemy against it, as appeared by the Pharisees in Christ's time. Grace comes not by the law, but by Christ; thou mayest stand long enough by it, before thou gettest any life of grace into thy soul, or further life into thy grace. If thou wouldest have this, thou must set thyself under Christ's wings by faith; from his spirit in the gospel alone comes his kindly natural heat to hatch thy soul to the life of holiness, and increase what thou hast; and thou canst not come under Christ's wings till thou comest from under the shadow of the other, by renouncing all expectation from thy own works and services. You know Reuben's curse that he should not excel, because he went up into his father's bed: when other tribes increased, he stood at a little number. By trusting in thy own works thou dost worse by Christ; and shalt thou excel in grace? Perhaps some of you have been long professors, and yet come to little growth in love to God, humility, heavenly mindedness, mortification; and it is worth the digging to see what lies at the root of your profession, whether there be not a legal principle that hath too much influenced you. Have you not thought to carry all with God from your duties and services, and too much laid up your hopes in your own actings? Alas! this is as so much dead earth, which must be thrown out, and gospel principles laid in the room thereof. Try but this course, and see whether the spring of thy grace will not come on apace. David gives an account how he came to stand and flourish, when some, that were rich and mighty, on a sudden withered and came to nothing. 'Lo,' saith he, 'this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches. But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever,' Psa. lii. 7, 8. While others trust in the riches of their own righteousness and services, and make not Christ their strength, do thou renounce all, and trust in the mercy of God in Christ, and thou shalt be like a green olive, when they fade and wither.

Secondly, Christian, you will not thrive in true comfort so long as you rest in any inherent work of grace, and do not stand clear of your own actings and righteousness. Gospel comfort springs from a gospel root, which is Christ. Phil. iii. 3: 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.' Now, a soul that rests on any holiness in himself, he grafts his comfort upon himself, not Christ; he sucks his own breast, not Christ's, and so makes Christ a dry nurse. And what comfort can grow on that dry tree? The Spirit is our comforter, as well as our teacher and counsellor. Now as the Spirit, when he teacheth, comes not with any new or strange truth, but takes of Christ's own, (what he finds in the word,) so, where he comforts, he takes of Christ's own, his righteousness, not our own. Christ is the matter and ground of his comfort; all cordials are but Christ distilled, and made up in several promises; his acting, not ours. He doth not say, Soul rejoice thou art holy; but, Soul, triumph, Christ is righteous, and is 'the Lord thy righteousness; not, Soul, thou prayest sweetly, fear not; but, Thou hast an Advocate with the Father, Christ the righteous. So that the first step to the receiving of comfort from the Spirit, is to send away all comforters of our own. As in learning of the Spirit, he that will be taught by him must first become a fool; that is, no way lean to his own understanding; so he that would be comforted must first be emptied of all self-supports; must

Digitized by Google

not lean to his own comforts. As a physician first bids his patient cast off all others he hath tampered with, he asks what physic he hath had from them, takes off their plasters, and throws away their physic, and goes about the work *de novo;* so the Spirit, when he comes to comfort a poor soul, first persuades the soul to send away all its own physicians. O, saith the soul, I have been in the hand of such a duty, such a course of obedience, and have thought, sure now I shall be well, and have comfort now I do this duty, set up on such a holy course. Well, saith the Spirit, if you will have me do anything, these must all be dismissed in point of confidence. Now, and not till now, is the soul a subject fit to receive the Spirit's comforts. And therefore, friends, as you love your inward peace, beware, what vessel you draw your comfort from. Grace is finite, and so cannot afford much; it is leaking, and so cannot hold long: thou drinkest in a riven dish that hast thy comforts from thy grace. It is mixed, and so, weak; and weak grace cannot give strong consolation; and such thou needest, especially in strong conflicts. Nay, lastly, thy comfort, which thou drawest from it, is stolen; thou dost not come honestly by it; and stolen comforts will not thrive with thee. Oh, what folly is it for the child to play the thief for that which he may freely and more fully have from his father, who gives and reproacheth not! That comfort which thou wouldest filch out of thy own righteousness and duties, behold it is laid up for thee in Christ, from whose fulness thou mayest carry as much as thy faith can hold, and none to check thee. Yea, the more thou improvest Christ for thy comfort, the more heartily welcome; we are bid to 'open our mouth wide, and he will fill it.'

CHAPTER XI.

THE THIRD KIND OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE, VIZ. PRIDE OF PRIVILEGES.

The third kind of pride (spiritual pride I mean) is pride of privileges; with which these wicked spirits labour to blow up the Christian. To name three:—

First, When God calls a person to some eminient place, or useth him to do some special peice of service.

Secondly, When God honours a saint to suffer for his truth or cause.

Thirdly, When God flows in with more than ordinary manifestations of his love, and fills the soul with joy and comfort. These are privileges not equally dispensed to all; and, therefore, where they are, Satan takes the advantage of assaulting such with pride.

SECTION I.—First, When God calls a person to some eminent place, or useth him to do some special piece of service. Indeed, it requires a great measure of grace to keep the heart low when the man stands high. The apostle, speaking how a minister of the gospel should be qualified, 1 Tim. iii. 6, saith, he must not be a 'novice,' or a young convert, 'lest he should be lifted up with pride, and fall into the condemnation of the devil.' As if he had said, This calling is honourable; if he be not well ballasted with humility, a little gust from Satan will toss him into this sin. The seventy that Christ first sent out to preach the gospel, and prevailed so miraculously over Satan, even these, while they trod on the serpent's head, he turned again, and had like to have stung them with pride; which our Saviour perceived, when they returned in triumph, and told what great miracles they had wrought; and therefore he takes them off that glorifying, lest it should degenerate into vain-glory, and bids them 'not rejoice that devils were subject to them, but rather that their names were writ in heaven.' As if he had said, It is not the honour of your calling, and success of your ministry that will save you; there shall be some cast to the devils, who shall then say, 'Lord, Lord, in thy name we have cast out devils:' and therefore value not yourselves by that; but rather evidence to your souls that ye are of mine elect ones, which will stand you more in stead at the great day than all this.

SECTION II.—A second privilege is, when God honours a person to suffer for his truth: this is a great privilege. 'Unto you it is given, not only to believe, but to suffer for his sake.' God doth not use to give worthless gifts to his saints; there is some preciousness in it which a carnal eye cannot see. Faith, you will say, is a great gift, but perseverance greater; without which faith would be little worth; and perseverance in suffering, this above both honourable. This made John Careless, our English martyr (who, though he died not at the stake,

Digitized by Google

yet in prison, for Christ), say, 'Such an hour it is as angels are not permitted to have, therefore God forgive me mine unthankfulness.' Now, when Satan cannot scare a soul from prison, yet then he will labour to puff him up in prison; when he cannot make him pity himself, then he will flatter him till he prides in himself. Affliction from God exposeth to impatience: for God, to pride; and therefore, Christians, labour to fortify yourselves against this temptation of Satan. How soon you may be called to suffering work, you know not; such clouds oft are not long arising. Now, to keep thy heart humble, when thou art honoured to suffer for the truth, consider,

First, Though thou dost not deserve those sufferings at man's hand, (thou canst and mayest in that regard glory in thy innocency; thou sufferest not as an evildoer), yet thou canst not but confess it is a just affliction from God in regard of sin in thee; and this methinks should keep thee humble. The same suffering may be martyrdom in regard of man, and yet a fatherly chastising for sin in regard of God. None suffered without sin but Christ: and therefore none may glory in them but he; Christ in his own, we in his. 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ,' Gal. vi. This kept Mr. Bradford humble in his sufferings for the truth; none more rejoiced in them, and blessed God for them, yet none more humble under them than he. And what kept him in this humble frame? Read his godly letters, and you shall find almost in all how he bemoans his sins, and the sins of the Protestants under the reign of King Edward:—'It was time,' saith he, 'for God to put his rod into the papists' hands; we were grown so proud, formal, unfruitful, yea, so as to loathe and despise the means of grace, when we enjoyed the liberty thereof; and therefore God hath brought the wheel of persecution on us.' As he looked at the honour to make him thankful; so to sin, to keep him humble.

Secondly, Consider who bears thee up, and carries thee through thy sufferings for Christ. Is it thy grace, or his, that is sufficient for such a work? thy spirit, or Christ's, by which thou speakest, when called to bear witness to the truth? How comes it to pass thou art a sufferer, and not a persecutor; a confessor, and not a denier; yea, a betrayer of Christ and his gospel? This thou owest to God; he is not beholden to thee, that thou wilt part with estate, credit, or life itself for his sake. If thou hadst a thousand lives, thou wouldst owe them all to him; but thou art beholden to God exceedingly, that he will call for these in this way, which has such an honour and reward attending it. He might have suffered thee to live in thy lusts, and at last to suffer the loss of all these for them. Oh, how many die at the gallows, as martyrs in the devil's cause, for felonies, rapes, and murders! Or he might withdraw his grace, and leave thee to thy own cowardice and unbelief, and then thou wouldst shew thyself in thy colours. The stoutest champions for Christ have been taught how weak they are if Christ steps aside. Some that have given great testimony of their faith and resolution in Christ's cause, even to come so near dying for his name, as to give themselves to be bound to the stake, and fire to be kindled upon them, yet then their hearts have failed; as that holy man, Mr. Benbridge, in our English martyrology, who thrusts the faggots from him, and cried out, 'I recant! I recant!' Yet this man, when reinforced in his faith, and endued with power from above, was able, within the space of a week after that sad foil, to die at the stake cheerfully; *Qui pro nobis mortem semel vicit, semper in nobis vincit;* he that overcame death for us, is he that always overcame death in us. And who should be thy song, but he that is thy strength? Applaud not thyself, but bless him. It is one of God's names; he is called 'the glory of his people's strength,' Psa. lxxxix. 17. The more thou gloriest in God that gives thee strength to suffer for him, the less thou wilt boast of thyself. A thankful heart and a proud cannot dwell together in one bosom.

Thirdly, Consider what a foul blot pride gives to all thy sufferings, where it is not bewailed and resisted, it alters the case. The old saying is, that it is not the punishment, but the cause makes the martyr: we may safely say further, it is not barely the cause, but the sincere frame of the heart in suffering for a good cause, that makes a man a martyr in God's sight. Though thou shouldst give thy body to be burned, if thou hadst not an humble heart of a sufferer for Christ, thou turnest merchant for thyself. Thou deniest but one self, to set up another; runnest the hazard of thy estate and life to gain some

Digitized by Google

applause, it may be, and rear up a monument to thy honour in the opinions of men; thou dost no more in this case than a soldier, who for the name of valour will venture into the mouth of danger and death; only thou shewest thy pride under a religious disguise; yet that helps it not, but makes it the worse. If thou wilt in thy sufferings be a sacrifice acceptable to God, thou must not only be ready to offer up thy life for his truth, but sacrifice thy pride also, or else thou mayest tumble out of one fire into another; suffer here from man, as a seeming champion for the gospel, and in another world from God, for robbing him of his glory in thy sufferings.

SECTION III.—A third privilege is, When God flows in with more than ordinary manifestations of his love; then the Christian is in danger of having his heart secretly lifted up in pride. Indeed, the genuine and natural effect, which such discoveries of Divine love have on a gracious soul, is to humble it. The sight of mercy increaseth the sense of sin, and that sense dissolves the soul kindly into sorrow, as we see in Magdalen. The heart which possibly was hard and frozen in the shade, will give and thaw in the sunshine of love, and so long all pride is hid from the creature's eye. 'Then,' saith God, Ezek. xxxvi. 31, 'ye shall remember your ways and your doings, that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight,' &c. And when shall this be, but when God would save them from all their uncleanness? as appears, ver. 25; yet notwithstanding this, there remain such dregs of corruption unpurged out of the best, that Satan finds it not impossible to make the manifestations of God's love an occasion of pride to the Christian; and truly God lets us see our proneness to this sin in the short stay he makes, when he comes with any greater discoveries of his love. The Comforter, it is true, abides for ever in the saint's bosom, but his joys come, and are gone again quickly. They are choice viands, with which he feasts the believer, but the cloth is soon drawn; and why so? but because we cannot bear them for our every-day food. A short interview of heaven, and a vision of love now and then upon the mount of an ordinance or affliction, cheers the spirits of drooping Christians, who, might they have leave to build tabernacles there, and dwell under a constant shine of such manifestations, would be prone to forget themselves, and think they were lords of their own comforts. If holy Paul was in danger of falling into this distemper of pride from his short rapture, (to prevent which, God saw it needful to let him blood with a thorn in the flesh,) would not our blood much more grow too rank, and we too crank and wanton, if we should feed long on such luscious food? And therefore, if ever, Christian, thou hadst need to watch, then is the time when comforts abound, and God dandles thee most on the knee of his love! when his face shines with clearest manifestations; lest this sin of pride, as a thief in the candle, should extinguish thy joy. To prevent which, thou shouldst do well, first, to look that thou measurest not thy grace by thy comfort, lest so thou shouldst be led into a false opinion that thy grace is strong, because thy comforts are so. Satan will be ready to help forward such thought as a fit medium to lift thee up, and slacken thy care in duty for the future. Such discoveries do indeed bear witness to the truth of thy grace, but not to the degree and measure of it; the weak child may be, yea, is oftener in the lap than the strong. Secondly, do not so much applaud thyself in thy present comfort, as labour to improve it for the glory of God. 'Up, and eat,' saith the angel to the prophet, 'because the journey is too great for thee.' The manifestations of God's love are to fit us for our work. It is one thing to rejoice in the light of our comfort, and another to go forth in the power of the Spirit comforting us, as giants refreshed with this wine, to run our race of duty and obedience with more strength and alacrity. He shews his pride that spends his time in telling his money merely to see how rich he is; but he has wisdom that lays out his money, and trades with it. The boaster of his comforts will loose what he hath, when he that improves his comforts in a fuller trade of duty shall add more to what he hath. Thirdly, remember thou dependest on God for the continuance of thy comfort. They are not the smiles thou hadst yesterday can make thee joyous to-day, any more than the bread thou didst then eat can make thee strong without more; thou needst new discoveries for new comforts; let God hide his face, and thou wilt soon lose the sight and forget the taste of what thou even now hadst. It is beyond our skill

Digitized by Google

or power to preserve those impressions of joy, and comfortable apprehensions of God's favour on our spirit, which sometimes we find; as God's presence brings those, so when he goes he carries them away with him, as the setting sun doth the day. We would laugh heartily at him who, when the sun shines in at his window, should think by shutting that to imprison the sunbeams in his chamber; and dost thou not show as much folly, who thinkest because thou now hast comfort, thou therefore shalt never be in darkness of spirit more? The believer's comfort is like Israel's manna; it is not like our ordinary bread and provision we buy at market, and lock up in our cupboards, where we can go to it when we will: no, it is rained as that was from heaven. Indeed God provided for them after this sort to humble them, Deut. viii. 16: 'Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee.' It was not such mean food because that God is said to humble them, for it was delicious food, therefore called 'angels' food,' Psa. lxxviii. 25; such as, if angels did eat, might serve them: but the manner of the dispensing it, from hand to mouth, every day their portion and no more, so that God kept the key of their cupboard, they stood to his immediate allowance; and thus God communicates our spiritual comforts for the same end to humble us. So much for this second sort of spiritual wickedness.

I had thought to have instanced in some other, as hypocrisy, unbelief, morality; but possibly the subject being general, what I have already said may be thought but a digression, and that too long.

I shall therefore conclude this branch of 'spiritual wickedness,' in a word to those who are yet in a natural and unsanctified state; which is, to stir them up from what I have said, concerning Satan's assaulting believers with such temptations, to consider seriously, that Satan's chief design against them also lies in the same sins. These are the wickednesses he labours to ingulf you in above all others. If ever you perish, it will be by the hand of these sins. It is your seared conscience, blind mind, and impenitent heart, will be your undoing, if you miscarry finally. Other sins, the devil knows, are preparatory to these, and therefore he draws thee into them to bring thee into these. Two ways they prepare a way to spiritual sins; first, as they naturally dispose the sinner to them; it is the nature of sin to blind the mind, stupify the conscience, harden the heart, as is implied, Heb. iii. 13: 'Lest your heart be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' As the feet of travellers beat the highway hard, so does walking in carnal, gross sins the heart; they benumb the conscience, so that in time the sinner loses his feeling, and can carry his lusts in his heart as bedlams their pins in their very flesh, without pain and remorse. Secondly, as they do provoke God by a judiciary act to give them up to these sins, Lam. iii. 65: 'Give them obstinacy of heart,' so it is in the margin, 'thy curse unto them.' And when the devil hath got sinners at this pass, then he hath them under lock and key. They are the forerunners of damnation; if God leave thy heart hard and unbroken up, it is a sad sign he means not to sow the seed of grace there. O sinners, pray, as he did request Peter for him, that none of these things may come upon you; which that they may not, take heed thou rejectest not the offers he makes to soften thee. God's hardening is a consequent of, and a punishment for, our hardening our own hearts. It is most true what Prosper saith, *Potest homo invitus amittere temporalia, non nisi volens amittere spiritualia:* A man may lose temporals against his will, but not spirituals; God will harden none, damn none, against their will.

CHAPTER XII.

SHEWETH WHAT THE PRIZE IS, WHICH BELIEVERS WRESTLE AGAINST THESE PRINCIPALITIES, POWERS, SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESSES FOR,

In high places.

SECTION I.—THESE words contain the last branch in the description of our grand enemy; which have in them some ambiguity, the adjective being only expressed in the original; *en tois epouraniois*, that is in heavenlies; the phrase being defective, our translators read it, in high or heavenly places, as if the

Digitized by Google

apostle intended to set out the advantage of place which this our enemy, by being above us, hath of us. Indeed this way most interpreters go; yet some, both ancient and modern, read the words, not, In heavenly places, but 'In heavenly things.' *En tois epouraniois*, saith Œcumenius, is as much as if the apostle had said, *Emin pale ou peri mikron tinon, alla uper ton en tois epouraniois pragmaton.* We wrestle not for small and trivial things, but for heavenly, yea, for heaven itself, and our adoption as he goes on. The same way Chrysostom carries it; *in cœlestibus, id est, pro cœlestibus Dei.* And after him Musculus, and other modern writers. The reasons which are given for this interpretation are weighty.

First, The word elsewhere indefinitely set down, is taken for things, not places, Heb. viii. 5. Nay, one observes this word to be used almost twenty times in the New Testament, and never for any aerial place, but always for things truly heavenly and spiritual; the word indeed properly signifies super-celestial, and, if applied to places, would signify, that where the devil never came since his fall.

Lastly, There seems no great argument to render Satan formidable by his being above us in place; it is some advantage indeed to men to gain the hill, or be above their enemy, in some place of strength, but none at all to spirits: but now take it of things, and then it adds weight to all the other branches of the description. We wrestle with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness; and against all these, not for such toys and trifles as the earth affords, which are inconsiderable whether to keep or lose; but for such as heaven holds forth; such an enemy, and such a prize, makes it matter of our greatest care how to manage the combat. The word thus opened, the note will be this.

Section II.—*Doct.* The chief prize for which we wrestle against Satan is heavenly. Or thus, Satan's main design is to spoil and plunder the Christian of all that is heavenly. Indeed all the Christian hath, or desires as a Christian, is heavenly; the world is extrinsical, both to his being and happiness; it is a stranger to the Christian, and intermeddles not with his joy or grief. Heap all the riches and honours of the world upon a man, they will not make him a Christian; heap them upon a Christian, they will not make him a better Christian. Again, take them all away, let every bird have his feather,—when stripped and naked, he will still be a Christian, and may be a better Christian. It was a notable speech of Erasmus, if spoken in earnest, and his wit were not too quick for his conscience, *Nihilo magis ambio opes et dignitates, quam elumbis equus graves sarcinas;* he said, He desired wealth and honour no more than a feeble horse doth a heavy cloak-bag. And I think every Christian in his right temper would be of his mind. Satan would do the saint little hurt, if he did bend his forces only or chiefly against his outward enjoyments; alas, the Christian doth not value them, or himself by them; this were as if one should think to hurt a man by beating of his clothes when he hath put them off. So far as the spirit of grace prevails in the heart of a saint, he hath put off the world in the desire of it, and joy of it, so that these blows are not much felt; and therefore they are his heavenly treasures which are the booty Satan waits for.

Section III.—First, The Christian's nature is heavenly, born from above; as Christ is the Lord from heaven, so all his offspring are heavenly and holy: now Satan's design is to debase and deflower this; it is the precious life of this new creature that he hunts for; he hath lost that beauty of holiness which once shone so gloriously on his angelical nature, and now, like a true apostate, he endeavours to ruin that in the Christian, which he hath lost himself. The seeds of this war are sown in the Christian's nature; you are holy,—that he cannot endure: *Miles, feri faciem*, was Cæsar's speech, when, to fight with the Roman citizens, he bid his soldiers strike at their face; These citizens, said he, love their beauty; mar that, and mar all. The soul is the face whereon God's image is stamped; holiness is the beauty of this face, which makes us indeed like God: this Satan knows God loves, and the saint is chary of: and therefore he labours to wound and disfigure this, that he may at once glory in the Christian's shame, and pour contempt upon God in breaking his image; and is it not worth engaging limb and life in battle against this enemy, who would rob us of that which makes us like God himself? Have you forgot the bloody articles of peace that Nahash offered to the men of Jabesh-Gilead? no peace to be had

Digitized by Google

except they would let him thrust out their right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel; and to see how it was entertained, read 1 Sam. xi. 6. The face is not so deformed that hath lost its eye, as the soul is that loseth its holiness; and no peace to be expected at Satan's hands, except he may deprive us of this; methinks, at the thought of this, the Spirit of the Lord should come upon the Christian, and his anger should be kindled much more against this cursed spirit than Saul's and the men of Israel's was against Nahash.

Secondly, The Christian's trade is heavenly; the merchandise he deals for is of the growth of that heavenly country, Phil. iii. 20: 'Our conversation is in heaven.' Every man's conversation is suitable to his calling; he whose trade is heavenly, follows that close. 'Every man minds his own business,' the apostle tells us. You may possibly find a tradesman out of his shop now and then, but he is as a fish out of the water, never in his element till he be in his calling again. Thus when the Christian is about the world, and the wordling about heavenly matters, both are men out of their way, not rightly girt, till they get into their employment again. Now this heavenly trade is that which Satan doth in an especial manner labour to stop. Could the Christian enjoy but a free trade with heaven a few years without molestation, he would soon grow a rich man, too rich indeed for earth; but what with losses sustained by the hands of this pirate Satan, and also the wrong he receives by the treachery of some in his own bosom, that, like unfaithful servants, hold correspondence with this robber, he is kept but low in this life; and much of his gains are lost; now the Christian's heavenly trade lies either within doors, or abroad; he can be free in neither; Satan is at his heels in both.

First, Within doors: this I may call his home trade, which is spent in secret between God and his own soul; here the Christian drives an unknown trade; he is at heaven and home again, richly laden in his thoughts with heavenly meditations, before the world knows where he hath been. Every creature he sees is a text for his heart to raise some spiritual matter and observations from. Every sermon he hears cuts him out work to make up and enlarge upon when he gets alone. Every providence is as wind to his sails, and sets his heart a moving in some heavenly affection or other, suitable to the occasion. One while he is wrapped up with joy in the consideration of mercy, another while melted into godly sorrow from the sense of his sins. Sometimes exalting God in his praises, anon abasing himself before God for his own vileness. One while he is at the breast of the covenant, milking out the consolations of the promises; another while working his heart into a holy awe and fear of the threatenings. Thus the Christian walks aloft, while the base worldling is licking the dust below. One of these heavenly pearls which the Christian trades for is more worth than the worldling gets with all his sweat and travel in his whole life. The Christian's feet stand where other men's heads are; he treads on the moon, and is clothed with the sun; he looks down on earthly men, as one from a high hill doth upon those that live in some fen or moor, and sees them buried in a fog of carnal pleasures and profits, while he breathes in a pure heavenly air; but yet not so high as to be free from all storms and tempests; many a sad gust he hath from sin and Satan without. What else mean those sad complaints and groans which come from the children of God, that their hearts are so dead and dull, their thoughts so roving and unfixed in duty, many times so wicked and filthy, that they dare hardly tell what they are, for fear of staining their own lips, and offending the ears of others by naming them? Surely the Christian finds it in his heart to will and desire he could meditate, pray, hear, and live after another sort than this? doth he not? Yes, I durst be his surety he doth. But so long as there is a devil tempts, and we continue within his walk, it will be thus, more or less: as fast as we labour to clear the spring of our hearts, he will be labouring to thicken or stop it again; so that we have two works to do at once; to perform a duty, and watch him that opposeth us; trowel and sword both in our hands. They had need work hard indeed, who have others continually endeavouring to pull down, as they are labouring to rear up the building.

Secondly, That part of the Christian's trade, which lies abroad, is heavenly also. Take a Christian in his relations, calling, neighbourhood, he is a heavenly trader in all; the great business of his life is to be doing or receiving some good;

Digitized by Google

that company is not for him, that will neither give nor take this. What should a merchant do where there is no buying nor selling? Every one labours, as his calling is, to seat himself where trade is quickest, and he is like to have most takings. The Christian, where he may choose, takes such in relations near to himself,—husband, wife, servants,—as may suit with his heavenly trade, and not such as will be a pull-back to him: he falls in with the holiest persons as his dearest acquaintance; if there be a saint in the town where he lives, he will find him out; and this shall be the man he will associate with; and in his conversation with these and all else, his chief work is for heaven: his heavenly principle within inclines him to it. Now this alarms hell: what, not contented to go to heaven himself, but by his holy example, gracious speeches, sweet counsels, seasonable reproofs, will be trading with others, and labour to carry them along with him also? This brings the lion fell and mad out of his den; such, to be sure, shall find the devil in their way to oppose them. 'I would have come,' saith Paul, 'but Satan hindered me. He that will vouch God, and let it appear by the tenor of his conversation that he trades for him, shall have enemies enough, the devil can help him to such.

Thirdly, The Christian's hopes are all heavenly; he harps not upon anything the world hath to give him. Indeed, he would think himself the most miserable man of all others, if here were all he could make of his religion. No, it is heaven and eternal life that he expects; and though he be so poor as not to be able to make a will of a groat, yet he counts himself a richer heir than if he were child to the greatest prince on earth. This inheritance he sees by faith, and can rejoice in the hope of the glory which it will bring him. The uncertain and cheating glory of the great ones of this world, moves him not to envy their fancied pomp; but when on the dunghill himself, he can forget his own present sorrows to pity them in all their bravery, knowing that within a few days the cross will be off his back, and the crowns off their heads together; their portion will be spent, when he shall be to receive all his. These things entertain him with such joy, that they will not suffer him to acknowledge himself miserable, when others think him, and the devil tells him he is such. This, this torments the very soul of the devil, to see the Christian under sail for heaven, filled with the sweet hope of his joyful entertainment when he comes there; and, therefore, he raiseth what storms and tempests he can, either to hinder his arrival in that blessed port, which he most desires, and doth not wholly despair of, or at least to make it a troublesome winter voyage, such as Paul's was, in which they suffered so much loss. And this, indeed, very often he obtains in such a degree, that by his violent, impetuous temptations beating long upon the Christian, he makes him throw over much precious lading of his joys and comforts; yea, sometimes he brings the soul through stress of temptation to think of quitting the ship, while for the present all hope of being saved seems to be taken away. Thus you see what we wrestle with devils for. We come to application.

Section IV.—*Use* 1. This is a word of reproof to four sorts of persons.

First, To those that are so far from wrestling against Satan for this heavenly prize, that they resist the offer of it. Instead of taking heaven by force, they keep it off by force. How long hath the Lord been crying in our streets, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!' How long have gospel-offers rung in our ears, and yet to this day many devil-deluded souls furiously drive on towards hell, and will not be persuaded back; who refuse to be called the children of God, and choose rather the devil's bondage than the glorious liberty with which Christ would make them free; esteeming the pleasures of sin for a season, greater treasures than the riches of heaven. It is told of Cato (who was Cæsar's bitter enemy) that when he saw Cæsar prevail, rather than fall into his hand and stand to his mercy, he laid violent hands on himself; which Cæsar hearing of, passionately broke out into these words: *O Cato, cur invidisti mihi salutem tuam?* O Cato, why didst thou envy me the honour of saving thy life? And do not many walk as if they judged Christ the honour of saving their souls? What other account can you give, sinners, of rejecting his grace? Are not heaven and happiness things desirable, and to be preferred before sin and misery? Why then do you not embrace them? or are they the worse, because they come swimming to you in the blood of Christ? Oh, how ill must

Digitized by Google

Christ take it to be thus used, when he comes on such a gracious embassy? May he not say to thee, as once he did to those officers sent to attack him, 'Do you come out against me as a thief, with swords and staves?' If he be a thief, it is only in this, that he would steal your sins from you, and leave heaven in the room. Oh, for the love of God, think what you do; it is eternal life you put away from you; in doing of which, 'you judge yourself unworthy of it,' Acts xiii. 46.

Secondly, It reproves those who are Satan's instruments to rob souls of what is heavenly. Among thieves there are some ye call setters, who inquire where a booty is to be had; which, when they have found, and know such a one travels with a charge about him, then they employ some other to rob him, and are themselves not seen in the business. The devil is the grand setter; he observes the Christian, how he walks, what place and company he frequents, what grace or heavenly treasure he carries in his bosom; which, when he hath done, he hath his instruments for the purpose to execute his design. Thus he considered the admirable graces of Job, and cast about how he might rob him of his heavenly treasure: and who but his wife and friends must do this for him? (well knowing that his tale would receive credit from their mouths.) Oh, friends, ask your consciences, whether you have not done the devil some service of this kind in your days. Possibly you have a child or servant who once looked heavenward, but your browbeating of them scared them back, and now it may be they are as carnal as you would have them: or possibly thy wife, before acquainted with thee, was full of life in the ways of God; but since she hath been transplanted into thy cold soil, what by thy frothy speeches and unsavoury conversation, at best thy worldliness and formality, she is now both decayed in her graces, and a loser in her comforts. Oh, man, what an indictment will be brought against thee for this act at God's bar! You would come off better, were it for robbing one of his money and jewels, than of his graces and comforts.

Thirdly, It reproves the woful negligence most show in labouring for this heavenly prize. None but would be glad their souls might be saved at last: but where is the man or woman that makes it appear, by their vigorous endeavour, that they mean in earnest? What warlike preparation do they make against Satan, who lies between them and home? Where are their arms, where their skill to use them, their resolution to stand to them, and conscionable care to exercise themselves daily in the use of them? Alas! this is rarity indeed, not to be found in every house where the profession of religion is hanged out at the door. If woulding and wishing would bring them to heaven, then they may come thither; but as for this wrestling and fighting, this making religion our business, they are as far from these as at last they are like to be from heaven. They are of his mind in Tully, who in a summer's day, as he lay indulging himself on the grass, would say, *O utinam hoc esset laborare!* O that this were to work, that I could lie here and do my day-labour! Thus many melt and waste their lives in sloth, and say in their hearts, O that this were the way to heaven! but will use no means to furnish themselves with grace for such an enterprise. I have read of a great prince in Germany, invaded by a more potent enemy than himself, yet from his friends and allies, who flocked in to his help, he soon had a good army, but had no money, as he said, to pay them; but the truth is, he was loth to part with it; for which some in discontent went away, others did not vigorously attend his business, and so he was soon beaten out of his kingdom; and his coffers, when his palace was rifled, were found full of treasure. Thus he was ruined, as some sick men die because unwilling to be at cost to pay the physician. It will add to the misery of damned souls, when they shall have leisure enough to consider what they have lost in losing God, to remember what means, offers, and talents they once had towards the obtaining of everlasting life, but had not a heart to use them.

Fourthly, It reproves those who make a great bustle and noise in religion, who are forward in profession, very busy to meddle with the strictest duties, as if heaven had monopolized their whole hearts; but, like the eagle, when they tower highest, their prey is below, where their eye is also. Such a generation there ever was and will be, that mingle themselves with the saints of God; who pretend heaven, and have their outward garb faced and fringed, as it were, with heavenly speeches and duties, while their hearts are lined with hypocrisy,

Digitized by Google

whereby they deceive others, and most of all themselves; such may be the world's saints, but devils in Christ's account. Have not I chosen twelve, and one of you is a devil? And truly, of all devils, none so bad as the professing devil, the preaching, praying devil. O sirs, be plain-hearted; religion is as tender as your eye, it will not be jested with: remember the vengeance which fell on Belshazzar, while he caroused in the bowls of the sanctuary. Religion and the duties of it are consecrated things, not made for thee to drink thy lusts out of. God hath remarkably appeared in discovering and confounding such as have prostituted sacred things to worldly ends. Jezebel fasts and prays, the better to devour Naboth's vineyard, but was devoured by it. Absalom was as sick till he had ravished his father's crown, as his brother Amnon till he had done the like to his sister; and, to hide his treason, he puts on a religious cloak, and therefore begs leave to go and pay his vow in Hebron, when he had another game in chase: and did he not fall by the hand of his hypocrisy? Of all men, their judgment is indorsed with most speed, who silver over worldly or wicked enterprises with heavenly semblances. Of this gang were those, 2 Pet. ii. 3, concerning whom the apostle saith, 'Their damnation slumbers not;' and those, Ezek. xiv. 7, 8, to whom God saith, 'I the Lord will answer him by myself, and I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord.'

Use 2. Secondly, Try whether they be heavenly things or earthly thou chiefly pursuest. Certainly, friends, we need not be so ignorant of our soul's state and affairs, did we oftener converse with our thoughts, and observe the haunts of our hearts. We soon can tell what dish pleaseth our palate best; and may you not tell whether heaven or earth be the most savoury meat to your souls? And if you should ask how you might know whether heaven be the prize you chiefly desire, I would put you only upon this double trial.

First, Art thou uniform in thy pursuit? Dost thou contend for heaven, and that which leads to heaven also? Earthly things God is pleased to retail; all have some, none have all. But in heavenly treasure he will not break the whole piece, and cut into remnants. If thou wilt have heaven, thou must have Christ; if Christ, thou must like his service as well as his sacrifice; no holiness, no happiness. If God would cut off so much as would serve men's turns, he might have customers enough: Balaam himself likes one end of the piece, 'he would die like a righteous man,' though live like a wizard as he was. No, God will not deal with such peddling merchants; that man alone is for God, and God for him, who will come roundly up to God's offer, and take all off his hands. One fitly compares holiness and happiness to those two sisters, Leah and Rachel. Happiness, like Rachel, seems the fairer (even a carnal heart may fall in love with that), but holiness, like Leah, is the elder, and beautiful also; though in this life it appears with some disadvantage, her eyes being bleared with tears of repentance, and her face furrowed with the works of mortification: but this is the law of that heavenly country, 'That the younger sister must not be bestowed before the elder. We cannot enjoy fair Rachel (heaven and happiness), except we first embrace tender-eyed Leah (holiness), with all her severe duties of repentance and mortification. Now, sirs, how like you this method? Art thou content to marry Christ and his grace, and then serving an hard apprenticeship in temptations both of prosperity and adversity, enduring the heat of the one, and the cold of the other, to wait till at last the other be given into thy bosom.

Secondly, If indeed heaven and heavenly things be the prize thou wrestlest for, thou wilt discover a heavenly deportment of heart, even in earthly things. Wherever you meet a Christian he is going to heaven; heaven is at the bottom of his lowest actions. Now observe thy heart in three particulars; in getting, in using, and in keeping earthly things, whether it be after a heavenly manner.

First, In getting earthly things. If heaven be thy chief prize, then thou wilt be ruled by a heavenly law in the gathering of these. Take a carnal wretch, and what his heart is set on he will have, though it be by hook or crook. A lie fits Gehazi's mouth well enough, so he may fill his pockets by it. Jezebel dares mock God, and murder an innocent man, for an acre or two of ground. Absalom, *regnandi causâ*, what will he not do? God's fence is too low to keep a graceless heart in bounds, when the game is before him; but a soul that hath heaven in

Digitized by Google

his eye, is ruled by heaven's law; he dares not step out of heaven's road to take up a crown, as we see in David's carriage towards Saul. Indeed, in so doing he should cross himself in his own grand design, which is the glory of God, and the happiness of his own soul in enjoying of him; upon these very terms the servants of God have refused to be rich and great in the world, when either of these lay at stake: Moses threw his court-preferment at his heels, 'refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.' Abraham scorned to be made rich by the king of Sodom, Gen. xiv. 22, that he might avoid the suspicion of covetousness and self-seeking; it shall not be said another day, that he came to enrich himself with the spoil, more than to rescue his kinsmen. Nehemiah would not take the tax and tribute to maintain his state, when he knew they were a poor peeled people, 'because of the fear of the Lord.' Dost thou walk by this rule? wouldst thou gather no more estate or honour than thou mayest have with God's leave, and will stand with thy hopes of heaven?

Secondly, Dost thou discover a heavenly spirit in using these things?

First, The saint improves his earthly things for an heavenly end. Where layest thou up thy treasure? Dost thou bestow it on thy voluptuous appetite, thy hawks and thy hounds; or lockest thou it up in the bosom of Christ's poor members? What use makest thou of thy honour and greatness? To strengthen the hands of the godly or the wicked? And so of all thy other temporal enjoyments. A gracious heart improves them for God; when a saint prays for these things, he hath an eye to some heavenly end. If David prays for life, it is not that he may live, but 'live and praise God,' Psal. cxix. 175. When he was driven from his regal throne by the rebellious arms of Absalom, see what his desire was and hope, 2 Sam. xv. 25: 'The king said to Zadock, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation.' Mark, not show me my crown, my palace, but the ark, the house of God.

Secondly, A gracious heart pursues earthly things with a holy indifference, saving the violence and zeal of his spirit for the things of heaven: he useth the former as if he used them not, with a kind of non-attendance; his head and heart is taken up with higher matters, how he may please God, thrive in his grace, enjoy more intimate communion with Christ in his ordinances; in these he spreads all his sails, plies all his oars, strains every part and power. Thus we find David upon his full speed: 'My soul pressed hard after thee,' Psa. lxiii. And before the ark we find him dancing with all his might. Now a carnal heart is clean contrary: his zeal is for the world, and his indifference in the things of God: he prays as if he did not pray, &c.; he sweats in his shop, but chills and grows cold in his closet. Oh how hard to pulley him up to a duty of God's worship, or to get him out to an ordinance! No weather shall keep him from the market; rain, blow or snow, he goes thither; but if the church-path be but a little wet, or the air somewhat cold, it is apology enough for him if his pew be empty. When he is about any worldly business, he is earnest at it, as the idolatrous smith in hammering of his image, 'who (the prophet saith) worketh it with the strength of his arms, yea, he is hungry and his strength faileth, he drinketh not, and is faint,' Isa. xliv. 12. So zealous is the muckworm in his worldly employments, that he will pinch his carcase, and deny himself his repast in due season, to pursue that; the kitchen there shall wait on the shop; but in the worship of God, it is enough to make him sick of the sermon, and angry with the preacher, if he be kept beyond his hour; here the sermon must give place to the kitchen; so the man for his pleasures and carnal pastime, he tells no clock at his sports, and knows not how the day goes; when night comes, he is angry that it takes him off: but at any heavenly work, O how is the man punished! time now hath got leaden heels, he thinks; all he does at a sermon is to tell the clock, and see how the glass runs. If men were not willing to deceive themselves, surely they might know which way their heart goes by the swift motion, or the hard tugging and slow pace it stirs, as well as they know in a boat whether they row against the tide or with it.

Thirdly, The Christian useth these things with a holy fear, lest earth should rob heaven, and his outward enjoyments prejudice his heavenly interest; he eats in fear, works in fear, rejoiceth in his abundance with fear: as Job sanctified his children by offering a sacrifice, out of a fear lest they had sinned; so

Digitized by Google

the Christian is continually sanctifying his earthly enjoyments by prayer, that so he may be delivered from the snare of them.

Thirdly, The Christian is heavenly in his keeping of earthly things. The same heavenly law which he went by in getting, he observes in holding them. As he dares not say he will be rich and honourable in the world, but if God will; so neither that he will hold what he hath, he only keeps them until his heavenly Father calls for them that at first gave them. If God will continue them to him, and entail them on his posterity too, he blesseth God; and so he desires to do also when he takes them away. Indeed God's meaning in the great things of this world, which sometimes he throws in upon the saints, is chiefly to give them the greater advantage of expressing their love to him, in denying them for his sake. God never intended by that strange providence, in bringing Moses to Pharaoh's court, to settle him there in worldly pomp and grandeur;—a carnal heart indeed would have expounded Providence, and interpreted it as a fair occasion put into his hands by God to have advanced himself into the throne, which some say he might in time have done;—but as an opportunity to make his faith and self-denial more eminently conspicuous in throwing all these at his heels, for which he hath so honourable a remembrance among the Lord's worthies, Heb. xi. 24, 25. And truly, a gracious soul reckons he cannot make so much of his worldly interests any other way, as by offering them up for Christ's sake; however, that traitor thought Mary's ointment might have been carried to a better market, yet no doubt that good woman herself was only troubled that she had not one more precious to pour on her Saviour's head. This makes the Christian ever to hold the sacrificing knife at the throat of his worldly enjoyments, ready to offer them up when God calls; overboard they shall go, rather than hazard a wreck to faith or a good conscience; he sought them in the last place, and therefore he will part with them in the first. Naboth will hazard the king's anger, which at last cost him his life, rather than sell an acre or two of land which was his birthright. The Christian will expose all he hath in this world, to preserve his hopes for another. Jacob in his march towards Esau sent his servants with his flocks before, and came himself with his wives behind; if he can save any thing from his brother's rage, it shall be what he loves best. If the Christian can save anything, it shall be his soul, his interest in Christ and heaven, and then no matter if the rest go; even then he can say, not as Esau to Jacob, I have a great deal; but as Jacob to him, I have all, Gen. xxxiii. 9, 11; all I want, all I desire; as David expresseth it, 'This is all my salvation, and all my desire,' 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Now try whether thy heart be tuned to this note. Does heaven give law to thy earthly enjoyments? Wouldst thou not keep thy honour, estate, no, not life itself, to prejudice thy heavenly nature and hopes? Which wouldst thou choose, if thou couldst not keep both, a whole skin or a sound conscience? It was a strange answer, if true, which the historian saith Henry the Fifth gave to his father, who had usurped the crown, and now dying, sent for this his son, to whom he said, Fair son, take the crown (which stood on his pillow by his head), but God knows how I came by it. To whom he answered, I care not how you came by it; now I have it, I will keep it as long as my sword can defend it. He that keeps earth by wrong, cannot expect heaven by right.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE PURSUIT OF HEAVEN AND HEAVENLY THINGS.

Use 3. Thirdly, Is it heaven and all that is heavenly that Satan seeks to hinder us of? Let this provoke us the more earnestly to contend for them. Had we to do with an enemy that came only to plunder us of earthly trifles, would honours, estates, and what this world affords us, stay his stomach, it might suffer a debate, in a soul that hath hopes of heaven, whether it were worth fighting to keep this lumber; but Christ and heaven, these sure are too precious to part withal upon any terms. Ask the kingdom for him also,' said Soloman to Bathsheba, when she begged Abishag for Adonijah. What can the devil leave thee worth if he deprive thee of these? And yet I confess I have heard of one, that wished God would let him alone, and not take him from what he had here. Vile brute! the choice of a swine, and not a man, that could choose to

Digitized by Google

wallow in the dung and ordure of his carnal pleasures, and wish himself for ever shut up with his swill in the hog's sty of this dunghill earth, rather than leave these to dwell in heaven's palace, and be admitted to no meaner pleasures than what God himself with his saints enjoys. It were even just if God gave such brutes as these a swine's face to their swinish hearts: but, alas! how few then should we meet that would have the countenance of a man! the greatest part of the world, even all that are carnal and worldly, being of the same mind, though not so impudent as that wretch, to speak what they think. The lives of men tell plain enough that they say in their hearts, It is good being here; that they wish they could build tabernacles on earth for all the mansions that are prepared in heaven. The transgression of the wicked said in David's heart, that 'the fear of God was not before them,' Psa. xxxvi. 1. And may not the worldliness of a muckworm say in the heart of any rational man, that heaven and heavenly excellencies are not before their eyes or thoughts? Oh, what a deep silence is there concerning these in the conversations of men! Heaven is such a stranger to the most, that very few are heard to inquire the way thither, or so much as ask the question in earnest, what they shall do to be saved. The most express no more desires of attaining heaven, than those blessed souls now in heaven do of coming again to dwell on earth; alas! their heads are full of other projects; they are either as Israel, scattered over the face of the earth to gather straw, or busied to pick that straw they have gathered; labouring to get the world, or pleasing themselves with what they have got. So that it is no more than needs to use some arguments to call men off the world to the pursuit of heaven, and what is heavenly.

First, For earthly things, it is not necessary that thou hast them; that is necessary which cannot be supplied *per vicarium*, with somewhat besides itself. Now, there is no such earthly enjoyment, but may be so supplied, as to make its room more desirable than its company. In heaven there shall be light, and no sun; a rich feast, and yet no meat; glorious robes, and yet no clothes; there shall want nothing, and yet none of this worldly glory be found there; yea, even while we are here, they may be recompensed: thou mayest be under infirmities of body, and yet better than if thou hadst health: 'The inhabitants shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity,' Isa. xxxiii. 34. Thou mayest miss of worldly honour, and obtain, with those worthies of Christ, Heb. xi., a good report by faith; and that is a name better than of the great ones of the earth; thou mayest be poor in the world, and yet rich in grace; and 'godliness with content is great gain.' In a word, if thou partest with thy temporal life, and findest an eternal, what dost thou lose by thy change? But heaven and heavenly things are such as cannot be recompensed with any other. Thou hast a heavenly soul in thy bosom; lose that, and where canst thou have another? There is but one heaven; miss that, and where can you take up your lodging but in hell? One Christ that can lead you thither; reject him, 'and there remains no more sacrifice for sin.' O that men would think on these things! Go, sinner, to the world, and see what it can afford you in lieu of these; may be it will offer to entertain you with its pleasures and delights: O poor reward for the loss of Christ and heaven! Is this all thou canst get? Doth Satan rob thee of heaven and happiness, and only give thee this nosegay to smell on as thou art going to thy execution? Will these quench hell-fire, or so much as cool those flames thou art falling into? Who but those that have perverted their understandings, would take these toys and new-nothings for Christ and heaven? While Satan is pleasing your fancies with these rattles and baubles, his hand is in your treasure, robbing you of that which is alone necessary: it is more necessary to be saved than to be; better not to be, than to have a being in hell.

Secondly, Earthly things are such, as it is a great uncertainty whether with all our labour we can have them or not. The world, though so many thousand years old, hath not learned the merchant such a method of trading, as that from it he may infallibly conclude he shall at least get an estate by his trade; nor the courtier such rules of comporting himself to the humour of his prince, as to assure him he shall rise. They are but few that carry away the prize in the world's lottery; the greater number have only their labour for their pains, and a sorrowful remembrance left them of their egregious folly, to be led such

Digitized by Google

a wild-goose chase after that which hath deceived them at last. But now for heaven and the things of heaven, there is such a clear and certain rule laid down, that if we will but take the counsel of the word, we can neither mistake the way, nor in that way miscarry of the end. 'As many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and the whole Israel of God.' There are some indeed who run, and yet obtain not this prize, that seek and find not, knock and find the door shut upon them; but it is, because they do it either not in the right manner, or in the right season. Some would have heaven; but, if God save them, he must save their sins also, for they do not mean to part with them; and how heaven can hold God and such company together, judge you: as they come in at one door, Christ and all those holy spirits with him would run out at the other. Ungrateful wretches! that will not come to this glorious feast, unless they may bring that with them which would disturb the joy of that blissful state, and offend all the guests that sit at the table with them; yea, drive God out of his own mansion-house. A second sort would have heaven, but, like him in Ruth, iv. 2—4, who had a mind to his kinsman Elimelech's land, and would have paid for the purchase, but he liked not to have it by marrying Ruth, and so missed of it. Some seem very forward to have heaven and salvation, if their own righteousness could procure the same; all the good they do, and duties they perform, they lay up for this purchase, but at last perish, because they close not with Christ, and take not heaven in his right. A third sort are content to have it by Christ, but their desires are so impotent and listless, that they put them upon no vigorous use of means to obtain him, and so, like the sluggard, they starve, because they will not pull their hands out of their bosom of sloth to reach their food that is before them; for the world they have metal enough, and too much; they trudge far and near for that, and when they have run themselves out of breath, can stand and 'pant after the dust of the earth,' as the prophet phraseth it, Amos ii. 7. But for Christ, and obtaining interest in him, O how key-co'd are they! There is a kind of cramp invades all the powers of their souls when they should pray, hear, examine their hearts, draw out their affections in hungerings and thirstings after his grace and Spirit. It is strange to see how they even now went full swoop to the world, are suddenly becalmed, not a breath of wind stirring to any purpose in their souls after these things: and is it any wonder that Christ and heaven should be denied to them that have no more mind to them? Lastly, Some have zeal enough to have Christ and heaven, but it is when the master of the house is risen, and hath shut to the door; and truly then they may stand long enough rapping before any come to let them in. There is no gospel preached in another world; but as for thee, poor soul, who art persuaded to renounce thy lusts, throw away the conceit of thy own righteousness, that thou mayest run with more speed to Christ; and art so possessed with the excellency of Christ, thy own present need of him, and salvation by him, that thou pantest after him more than life itself;—in God's name go on and speed, be of good comfort; he calls thee by name to come unto him, that thou mayest have rest for thy soul. There is an office in the word where thou mayest have thy soul and its external happiness insured to thee. Those that come to him, as he will himself in no wise cast away, so not suffer any other to pluck them away. 'This day,' said Christ to Zaccheus, 'salvation is come to thy house,' Luke xix. 9. Salvation comes to thee, poor soul, that openest thy heart to receive Christ; thou hast eternal life already, as sure as if thou wast a glorified saint now walking in that heavenly city. O sirs, if there were a free trade proclaimed to the Indies, enough gold for all that went, and a certainty of making a safe voyage, who would stay at home? But alas, this can never be had: all this, and infinitely more, may be said for heaven; and yet how few leave their uncertain hopes of the world to trade for it? What account can be given for this, but the desperate atheism of men's hearts? They are not yet fully persuaded whether the Scripture speaks true or not, whether they may rely upon the discovery that God makes in his word of this new-found land, and those mines of spirituals there to be had, as certain. God open the eyes of the unbelieving world, as he did the prophet's servants, that they may see these things to be realities, not fictions; it is faith only that gives a being to those things in our hearts. By faith Moses saw him that was invisible.

Thirdly, Earthly things, when we have them, we are not sure of them; like

Digitized by Google

birds, they hop up and down, now on this hedge, and anone upon that, none can call them his own; rich to-day, and poor to-morrow; in health when we lie down, and arrested with pangs of death before midnight. Joyful parents, one while solacing ourselves with the hopes of our budding posterity, and may be ere long knocks one of Job's messengers at our door to tell us they are all dead; now in honour, but who knows whether we shall not live to see that buried in scorn and reproach? The Scripture compares the multitude of people to waters; the great ones of the world sit upon these waters; as the ship floats upon the waves, so do their honours upon the breath and favour of the multitude; and how long is he like to sit that is carried upon a wave? One while they are mounted up to heaven, as David speaks of the ship, and then down again they fall into the deep. 'We have ten parts in the king,' say the men of Israel, 2 Sam. xix. 43; and in the very next verse, Sheba doth but sound a trumpet of sedition, saying, 'We have no part in David, no inheritance in the son of Jesse;' and the wind is in another corner presently; for it is said, 'Every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba.' Thus was David cried up and down, and that almost in the same breath. Unhappy man, he that hath no surer portion than what this variable world will offer him! The time of mourning for the departure of all earthly enjoyments is at hand: we shall see them, as Eglon's servants did their lord, fallen down dead before us, and weep because they are not. What folly then is it to dandle this vain world in our affections, whose joy, like the child's laughter on the mother's knee, is sure to end in a cry at last, and neglect heaven and heavenly things which endure for ever! O remember Dives stirring up his pillow, and composing himself to rest, how he was called up with the tidings of death before he was warm in his bed of ease, and laid with sorrow on another, which God had made for him in flames, from whence we hear him roaring in the anguish of his conscience! O soul, couldst thou but get an interest in the heavenly things we are speaking of, these would not thus slip from under thee! heaven is a kingdom that cannot be shaken, Christ an abiding portion, his graces and comforts sure waters that fail not, but spring up unto eternal life. The quails that were food for the Israelites' lust soon ceased, but the rock that was drink to their faith followed them; this rock is Christ; make sure of him, and he will make sure of thee; he will follow thee to thy sick bed, and lie in thy bosom, cheering thy heart with his sweet comforts, when worldly joys lie cold upon thee, as David's clothes on him, and no warmth of comfort to be got from them. When thy outward senses are locked up, that thou canst neither see the face of thy dear friends, nor hear the counsel and comfort they would give thee, then he will come, though these doors be shut, and say, Peace be to thee, my dear child, fear not death or devils, I stay to receive thy last breath, and have here my angels waiting, that as soon as thy soul is breathed out of thy body, they may carry and lay it in my bosom of love, where I will nourish thee with those eternal joys that my blood hath purchased, and my love prepared for thee.

Fourthly, Earthly things are empty and unsatisfying. We may have too much, but never enough of them; they oft breed loathing, but never content; and indeed how should they, being so disproportionate to the vast desires of these immortal spirits that dwell in our bosoms? A spirit hath not flesh and bones, neither can it be fed with such; and what hath the world, but a few bones covered over with some fleshly delights, to give it? The less is blessed of the greater, not the greater of the less. These things, therefore, being so far inferior to the nature of man, he must look higher if he will be blessed, even to God himself, who is the Father of spirits. God intended these things for our use, not enjoyment; and what folly is it to think we can squeeze that from them which God never put in them? They are breasts, that, moderately drawn, yield good milk, sweet, refreshing; but wring them too hard, and you will suck nothing but wind or blood from them. We lose what they have by expecting to find what they have not: none find less sweetness, and more dissatisfaction in these things, than those who strive most to please themselves with them. The cream of the creature floats on the top; and he that is not content to skim it, but thinks by drinking a deeper draught to find yet more, goes further to speed worse; being sure by the disappointment he shall meet to pierce himself through with many sorrows. But all these fears might happily

Digitized by Google

he escaped, if thou wouldst turn thy back on the creature, and face about for heaven. Labour to get Christ, and through him hopes of heaven; and thou takest the right road to content, thou shalt see it before thee, and enjoy the prospect of it as thou goest, yea, find that every step thou drawest nearer and nearer to it. Oh what a sweet change wouldst thou find! as a sick man coming out of an impure, unwholesome climate, where he never was well, when he gets into the fresh air, or his native soil, so wilt thou find a cheering of thy spirit, and reviving thy soul with unspeakable content and peace. Having once closed with Christ, first, the guilt of all thy sins is gone, and this spoiled all thy mirth before; all your dancing of a child, when some pin pricks it, will not make it quiet or merry; well, now that pin is taken out which robbed thee of the joy of thy life. Secondly, thy nature is renewed and sanctified, and when is a man at ease, if not when he is in health? And what is holiness but the creature restored to his right temper in which God created him? Thirdly, Thou becomest a child of God, and that cannot but please thee well, I hope, to be son or daughter to so great a King. Fourthly, thou hast a right to heaven's glory, whither thou shalt ere long be conducted to take and hold possession of that thy inheritance for ever; and who can tell what that is? Nicephorus tells us of one Agbarus, a great man, that hearing so much of Christ's fame, by reason of the miracles he wrought, sent a painter to take his picture; and that the painter when he came was not able to do it, because of that radiancy of Divine splendour which sat on Christ's face. Whether this be true or no, I leave it; but to be sure, there is such a brightness on the face of Christ glorified, and that happiness which in heaven saints shall have with him, as forbids us, that dwell in mortal flesh, to conceive of it aright, much more to express; it is best going thither to be informed, and then we shall confess we on earth heard not half of what we there find, yea, and that our present conceptions are no more like to that vision of glory we shall there have, than the sun in the painter's picture is to the sun itself in the heavens. And if all this be so, why then do you spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not, yea, for that which keeps you from that which can satisfy? Earthly things are like some trash, which do not only not nourish, but take away the appetite from that which would; heaven and heavenly things are not relished by a soul vitiated with these. Manna, though for deliciousness called angels' food, was yet but light bread to an Egyptian palate. But these spiritual things depend not on thy opinion, O man, whoever thou art, as earthly things in a great measure do, that the value of them should rise or fall as the world's exchange doth, and as vain man is pleased to rate them; think gold dirt, and it is so, for all the royal stamp on it; count the swelling titles of worldly honour that proud dust so brags in, vanity, and they are such; but have base thoughts of Christ, and he is not the worse: slight heaven as much as you will, it will be heaven still; and when thou comest so far to thy wits with the prodigal as to know which is the best fare, husks or bread; where is the best living, among hogs in the field, or in thy Father's house; then thou wilt know how to judge of these heavenly things better. Till then go and make the best market thou canst of the world; but look not to find this pearl of price, true satisfaction to thy soul, in any of the creature shops; and were it not better to take it when thou mayest have it, than after thou hast wearied thyself in vain in following the creature, to come back with shame, and may be miss of it here also, because thou wouldst not have it when it was offered?

VERSE 13. *Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

THE apostle in these words resumes his former exhortation, mentioned ver. 11, and presseth it with a new force from that more particular discovery which he gives of the enemy, ver. 12; where, like a faithful scout, he makes a full report of Satan's great power and malice, and also discloseth what a dangerous design he hath upon the saints, no less than to despoil them of all that

Digitized by Google

heavenly: from all which he gives them a second alarm, and bids them 'Arm! arm! wherefore take unto you,' &c. In the words consider,

First, The exhortation with the inference, 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God.'

Secondly, The argument with which he urgeth the exhortation, and that is double.

First, 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.'

Secondly, 'Having done all, to stand;' that is, both able to fight, and able to conquer. As for the first general, 'the exhortation,' we shall waive it as to the substance of it, being the same with what we have handled, ver. 11. Only there are two observables which we shall lightly touch. The one from the repetition of the very same exhortation so soon, one verse only interposed. The other from the verb the apostle useth here; which being not the same with ver. 11, affords a different note. There it is, *endusasthe*, here, *analambanete*.

CHAPTER I.

THE REASON WHY THE APOSTLE RENEWS THE SAME EXHORTATION; AND ALSO WHAT TRUTHS MINISTERS ARE OFTEN TO PREACH TO THEIR PEOPLE.

First, Of the first, the repetition of the same exhortation, and that in so short a space. Sure it was not for want of matter, but rather out of abundance of zeal, that he harps the second time on the same string. Indeed, he is the better workman, who drives one nail home with reiterated blows, than he which covets to enter many, but fastens none. Such preachers are not likely to reach the conscience, who hop from one truth to another, but dwell on none. Every hearer is not so quick as the preacher, to take a notion as it is first darted forth; neither can many carry away so much of that sermon, which is made up all of varieties, where a point is no sooner named, but presently pulls back its hand, and another makes a breach and comes forth, before the first hath been opened and hammered upon the conscience by a powerful application, as where the discourse is homogeneal, and some one necessary truth is cleared, insisted on, and urged home with blow upon blow; here the whole matter of the discourse is akin, and one part remembered, brings the memory acquainted with the other; whereas in the former, one puts out the other in a weak memory. Short hints and away, may please a scholar, but not so profitable for others; the one more fit for the schools, but the other for the pulpit. Were I to buy a garment in a shop, I should like him better that lays one good piece or two before me that are for my turn, which I may fully examine, than him who takes down all his shop, and heaps piece upon piece, merely to show his store, till at last for variety, I can look attentively on none, they lie so one upon another.

Again, As it is profitable thus to insist on truths, so it is not unbecoming a minister to preach the same truths again and again: Paul here goes over and over the same exhortation, ver. 11 and 13; and elsewhere tells us, 'this is not grievous to him, but to them it is safe,' to hear the same thing over and over; Phil. iii. 1. There are three sorts of truths must in our ministry be preached oft.

First, Fundamental truths, or, as we call them, catechism points, that contain truths necessary to be known and believed. The weight of the whole building lies on these ground-cells more than on superstructory truths. In a kingdom there are some staple commodities and trades, without which the commonwealth could not subsist, as wool, corn, &c., in our country; and these ought to be encouraged above others, which though they be an ornament to the nation, yea, add to the riches of it, yet are not so necessary to the subsistence of it. Thus here, there is an excellent use of our other ministerial labours, as they tend to beautify and adorn, yea, enrich the Christian with the knowledge of spiritual mysteries; but that which is chiefly to be regarded, is the constant faithful opening of those main truths as the gospel: these are the landmarks, and shew us the bounds of truths; and as it is in towns that abut one upon another, if the inhabitants do not sometimes perambulate, and walk the bounds, to shew the youth what they are, when the old studs are gone, the next generation may lose all their privileges by their encroaching neighbours, because

Digitized by Google

not able to tell what is their own. There is no fundamental truth, but hath some evil neighbour (heresy I mean) butting on it; and the very reason why a spirit of error hath so encroached of late years upon truth, is, because we have not walked the bounds with our people, in acquainting them with, and establishing their judgments on these fundamental points, so frequently and carefully as is requisite. And people are so much in fault, because they cast so much contempt upon this work that they count a sermon on such points next to lost, and only child's meat.

Secondly, Those truths are oft to be preached, which ministers observe to be most undermined by Satan or his instruments in the judgments or lives of their people. The preacher must read and study his people as diligently as any book in his study; and as he finds them, dispense like a faithful steward unto them. Paul takes notice that the Galatians had been in ill handling by false apostles, who had even bewitched them back to the law in that great point of justification, and see how he beats upon that point. Our people complain, we are so much, so oft reproving the same error or sin; and the fault is their own, because they will not leave it. Who will blame the dog for continuing to bark, when the thief is all the while in the yard? Alas, alas, it is not once or twice rousing against sin, will do it! When people think the minister shews his laziness, because he preaches the same things, he may then be exercising his patience, in continuing to exhort and reprove those who oppose, waiting, if at last God will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth. We are bid to lift up our voice like a trumpet; and would you have us cease while the battle lasts, or sound a retreat when it should be a battle?

Thirdly, Truths of daily use and practice. These are like bread and salt; whatever else is on, these must be on the board every meal. St. Peter was of this mind, 2 Pet. i. 12: 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them.' He had, you may see, been speaking of such graces and duties, that they could not pass a day without the exercise of them, and therefore will be ever their monitor to stir up their pure minds about them. All is not well, when a man is weary of his ordinary food, and nothing will go down but rarities; the stomach is sickly, when a man delights rather to pick some salad, than eat of solid meat: and how far this dainty age is gone in this spiritual disease, I think few are so far come to themselves, as yet to consider and lament. O sirs, be not weary, as in doing, so not in hearing those savoury truths preached you have daily use of, because ye know them, and have heard them often: faith and repentance will be good doctrine to preach and hear to the end of the world. You may as well quarrel with God because he hath made but one heaven, and one way to it, as be offended at the preacher for preaching these over and over. If thy heart be humble, and thy palate spiritual, old truths will be new to thee every time thou hearest them. In heaven, the saints draw all their wine of joy, as I may so say, at one tap, and shall to all eternity, and yet it never tastes flat. God is that one object their souls are filled with, and never weary of; and can anything of God and his love be wearisome to thee in the hearing here? I am not all this while an advocate for any loiterer in our Lord's vineyard, for any slothful servant in the work of the gospel, who wraps up his talent in idleness, or buries it in the earth, where, may be, he is digging and playing the worldling all the week, and then hath nothing to set before his people on the Lord's day, but one or two mouldy loaves, which were kneaded many years before. This is not the good steward; here is the old, but where are the new things which he should bring out of his treasure? If the minister labours not to increase his stock, he is the worst thief in the parish. It is wicked for a man, trusted with the improving of orphans' estates, to let them lie dead by him; much more for a minister not to improve his gifts, which I may call the town-stock given for the good of the souls of both rich and poor. If that preacher was wise Eccl. xii. 9, who still 'taught the people knowledge,' that is, was ever going on, endeavouring to build them higher in knowledge, and that he might, did 'give good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs;' then surely he will be proved a foolish preacher at last, that wastes his time in sloth, or spends more of it in studying how to add to his estate out of his people's, than how to add to their gifts and graces, by a conscientious endeavour to increase his own.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

THE BEST OF SAINTS SUBJECT TO DECLINE IN THEIR GRACES, AND WHY WE ARE TO ENDEAVOUR A RECOVERY OF DECAYS IN GRACE.

THE second observable in the exhortation is taken from the verb which the apostle useth, *analambanete*, which signifies not only to take, but to take again, or recover a thing which we have lost, or reassume a thing which for the present we have left. Now the apostle writing to the saints at Ephesus, who (at least many of them) were not now to put on this armour by a conversion, or the first work of faith, which no doubt had already passed upon many among them, he, in regard of them and believers to the end of the world, hath a further meaning, *i.e.*, that they would put on more clothes where this armour hangs loose, and they would recover where they have let fall any duty, or decayed in any grace. So that the note is,

Doct. That the Christian should have an especial care to repair his broken armour, to recover his decayed graces. This armour may be battered; I might shew sad examples in the several pieces. Was not Jacob's girdle of truth and sincerity unbuckled, when he used that sinful policy to get the blessing? He was not the plain man then, but the supplanter; but he had as good have stayed God's time; he was paid home in his own kind: he puts a cheat on his father, and did not Laban put a cheat on him, giving Leah for Rachel? What say you of David's breastplate of righteousness, in the matter of Uriah? Was it not shot through, and that holy man fearfully wounded, who lay almost a year (for aught we read of him) before he came to himself, so far as to be thoroughly sensible of his sin, till Nathan, a faithful surgeon, was sent to search the wound, and clear it of that dead flesh which had grown over it? And Jonah (otherwise a holy prophet), when God would send him on an errand to Nineveh, he hath his shoes to seek, I mean that preparation and readiness with which his mind should have been shod, to have gone at the first call. Good Hezekiah, we find how near his helmet of hope was of being beat off his head, who tells us himself what his thoughts were in the day of his distress; that he 'should not see the Lord in the land of the living,' expecting that God would never let go his hold, 'till like a lion he had broke his bones, and at last made an end of him.' Even Abraham himself, famous for faith, yet had his fits of unbelief, and distrustful qualms coming over his valiant heart. Now in this case, the Christian's care should be to get his armour speedily repaired; a battered helmet is next to no helmet, in point of present use; grace in a decay is like a man pulled off his legs by sickness; if some means be not used to recover it, little service will be done by it, or comfort received from it. Therefore Christ gives the church of Ephesus (to whom Paul wrote this epistle) this counsel, to 'remember from whence she was fallen, to repent and do her first works.' How many does a declining Christian wrong at once!

First, He wrongs God, and that in a high degree, because God reckons upon more honour to be paid him in by his saints' grace than by all other talents which his creatures have to trade with in the world. He can in some sense better bear the open sins of the world, than the decays of his saints' graces: they, by abusing their talents, rob him of his 'oil, flax, and wool;' but the Christian by the other bereaves him of the glory which should be paid him from his faith, zeal, patience, self-denial, sincerity, and the rest. Suppose a master should trust one servant with his money, and another with his child to look to; would he not be more displeased to see his dear child hurt, or almost killed, by the negligence of the one, than his money stolen by the carelessness of the other? Grace is the new creature, the birth of the Spirit; when this comes to any harm by the Christian's careless walking, it must needs go nearer the heart of God, than the wrong he hath from the world, who are trusted with nothing like this.

Secondly, He that declines in grace, and labours not to repair it, he wrongs his brethren, who have a share in another's grace: he wrongs his whole body, that seeks not cure for a wound in any member. We are bid 'to love one another,' 2 John, ver. 5. But how shall we shew our love to one another? The very next words will direct us; 'And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.' Indeed, we shew little love to our brethren by sinning, whereby we are sure either to ensnare them, or grieve them: and how to let

Digitized by Google

grace go down, and sin not go up, is a riddle to any that know what they both are.

Thirdly, The Christian wrongs himself in not endeavouring to repair his broken armour, and recover his declining grace. By this he loses the evidence of his inheritance, or at least so blots it, that it cannot be so clearly perceived by him. A declining Christian must needs be a doubting Christian, because the common symptom of an hypocrite is, to wear and waste like a stake set in the ground, which rots; while true grace, like the tree, grows. Is not this the knot which the devil puzzleth many poor souls withal, and finds them work for many years to untie? If thou wast a Christian, thou wouldst grow; right saints go from strength to strength, and thou goest from strength to weakness. They go up the hill to Zion; every ordinance and providence is a step that bears them nearer heaven: but thou goest down the hill, and art further from thy salvation than when thou didst first believe (as thou thoughtest). And doth it stand with thy wisdom, Christian, to put a staff into the devil's hand, an argument into his mouth, to dispute against thy salvation with? If you held an estate by the life of a child, which upon the death of it should all go away from you, that child I warrant you should be well looked unto; his head should not ache, but you would post to the physician for counsel. I pray what is your evidence for that glorious estate you hope for? Is it not Christ within you? Is not this new creature (which may well be called Christ for its likeness to him) the young heir of heaven's glory? And when that is sick or weak, is it not time to use all means for its recovery? While thus, thou canst neither live nor die comfortably. Not live. A man in a consumption has little joy of his life: he neither finds sweetness in his meat, nor delight in his work, as an healthful man doth. Oh, how sweet is the promise to faith, when active and vigorous! How easy the yoke of the command to the Christian, when his conscience is not galled with guilt, nor his strength enfeebled by temptation! But the Christian in a declining condition tastes not the promise; every command is grievous, and every duty burdensome to him: he goes in pain, like one whose foot is out of joint, though the way be ever so pleasant. And he is as unfit to die, as he is to live. Such an one can like no more to hear the news of death, than a tenant that wants his rent doth to hear of the quarter-day. This made David beg time of God; 'Spare me a little, that I may recover my strength.'

Having shewn you why the Christian should endeavour to recover his declining graces, it will be very requisite to give a word of counsel to the Christian.

First, To direct him how to judge of the declining state of grace, that he may not pass a false judgment upon himself therein.

Secondly, To direct him when he finds grace to be in a declination, how he may recover it.

CHAPTER III.

A CAUTIONARY DIRECTION FROM WHAT WE MAY NOT, AS ALSO FROM WHAT WE MAY JUDGE OUR GRACES TO BE IN A DECLINATION.

Quest. First of the first; how may a Christian judge whether grace be declining in him or no?

Answ. First, I shall resolve this negatively, and shew by what he is not to judge his grace to decline.

Secondly, Positively, by what he may certainly conclude a decay of grace.

First, Negatively, and that in several particulars.

First, Christian, do not judge grace to be fallen weaker, because thy sense of corruption is grown stronger. This oft lies at the bottom of poor souls' complaints in this case; oh, they never felt pride, hypocrisy, and other corruptions so haunt them, as now; none knows how they are vexed with these and the like, besides themselves. Now let me ask thee, who makes this sad moan? whether thou dost not think these corruptions were in thee before thou didst thus feel them? How oft hast thou prayed as formally, and not been troubled? How oft hast thou stood chatting with the same lusts, and thy soul hath not been laid low before the Lord with such abasement of thyself as now? Deal faithfully between God and thy soul, and tell not a lie for God, by bearing false witness against thyself. If it be thus, thou hast rather a comfortable sign of grace

Digitized by Google

growing, than decaying. Sin cannot be on the getting hand, if the sense of sin grow quick. This is the concomitant of a thriving soul; none so full of complaints of their own hearts as such; the least sin goes now to their very souls, which makes them think worse of themselves than ever: but it is not the increase of sin in them, but the advance of their love to Christ makes them judge so. When the sun shines with some power, and the year gets up, we observe, though we may have frost and snow, yet they do not lie long, but are soon dissolved by the sun. Oh! it is a sweet sign that the love of Christ shines with a force upon thy soul, that no corruptions can lie long in thy bosom, but they melt into sorrow and bitter complaints; that is, the decaying soul, where sin lies bound up and frozen, little sense of, or sorrow for it appears.

Secondly, Take heed thou thinkest not grace decays, because thy comfort withdraws. The influence of the sun comes where the light of it is not to be found; yea, is mighty, as appears in those mines of gold and silver which are concocted by the same. And so may the actings of grace be vigorous in thee, when least under the shinings of his countenance. Did ever faith triumph more than in our Saviour, crying, 'My God, my God!' Here faith was at its meridian, when it was midnight in respect of joy. Possibly thou comest from an ordinance, and bringest not home with thee those sheaves of comfort thou usest to do, and therefore concludest grace acted not in thee as formerly. Truly, if thou hast nothing else to go by, thou mayest wrong the grace of God in thee exceedingly; because thy comfort is extrinsical to thy duty: a boon which God may give or not, yea, doth give to the weak, and deny to the strong. The traveller may go as fast, and ride as much ground, when the sun doth not shine as when it doth; though indeed, he goes not so merrily on his journey; nay, sometimes he makes the more haste; the warm sun makes him sometimes to lie down and loiter; but when dark and cold, he puts on with more speed. Some graces thrive best, like some flowers, in the shade, such as humility, dependence on God, &c.

Thirdly, Take heed thou dost not mistake, and think thy grace decays, when may be it is only thy temptations increase, and not thy grace decreases. If you should hear a man say, because he cannot to-day run so fast, when an hundredweight is on his back, as he could yesterday without any such a burden, that therefore he was grown weaker, you would soon tell him where his mistake lies. Temptation lies not in the same heaviness always upon the Christian's shoulder. Observe, therefore, whether Satan is not more than ordinary let loose to assault thee; whether thy temptations come not with more force and violence than ever; possibly, though thou dost not with the same facility overcome these, as thou hast done less, yet grace may act stronger in conflicting with the greater than in overcoming the less. The same ship, that when light ballasted and favoured with the wind, goes mounting; at another time, deeply laden, and going against wind and tide, may move with a slow pace, and yet they in the ship take more pains to make it sail thus, than they did when it went faster.

Secondly, Positively; how thou mayest conclude that grace is declining; and that in a threefold respect.

First, In reference to temptations to sin.

Secondly, In reference to the duties of God's worship.

Thirdly, The frame of thy heart in worldly employments.

First, In reference to sin; and that is threefold.

First, When thou art not so wakeful to discover the encroachings of sin upon thee as formerly. At one time we find David's heart smote him, when he but rent the skirt of Saul's garment. At another time, when his eye glanced on Bathsheba, he takes no such notice of the snare Satan had him in, and so is led from one sin to another; which plainly shews that grace in him was heavy-eyed, and his heart not in so holy a frame as it had been. If an enemy comes up to the gates, and the sentinel not so much as gives an alarm to the city of his approach, it shews he is off his guard, either fallen asleep or worse. If grace were awake, and thy conscience had not contracted some hardness, it would do its office.

Secondly, When a temptation to sin is discovered, and thou findest thy heart shut up, that thou dost not pray against it, or not with that zeal and holy

Digitized by Google

indignation as formerly upon such occasions, it is a bad sign that lust hath got an advantage of thy grace, that thou canst not readily betake thyself to thy arms. Thy affections are bribed, and this makes thee so cold a suitor at the throne of grace for help against thine enemy.

Thirdly, When the arguments prevailing most with thee to resist temptations to sin, or to mourn for sin committed, are more carnal and less evangelical than formerly. May be thou rememberest when thy love to Christ would have spit fire on the face of Satan, tempting thee to such a sin, but now that holy fire is so abated, that if there were not some other carnal motives to make the vote full, it would hazard to be carried for it rather than against it. And so in mourning for a sin, there is possibly now some slavish arguments, like an onion in the eye, which makes thee weep, rather than pure ingenuity arising from love to God, whom thou hast offended. This speaks a sad decay; and the more mixture there is of such carnal arguments, either in the resisting of, or mourning for, sin, the greater the declination of grace is. David's natural heat sure was much decayed when he needed so many clothes to be laid on him, and yet feel so little heat; the time was he would have sweat with fewer. I am afraid of many, their love to Christ will be found, in these declining times, to have lost so much of its youthful vigour, that what would formerly have put them into a holy fury and burning zeal against some sins, such as Sabbath-breaking, pride of apparel, neglect of family duties, &c., hath now much ado to keep any heat at all in them against the same.

Secondly, In point of duties of worship.

First, If thy heart doth not prompt thee with that forwardness and readiness as formerly, to hold communion with God in any duty. Possibly thou knowest the time when thy heart echoed back to the motions of God's Spirit, bidding thee 'seek his face; Thy face, Lord, will I seek;' yea, thou didst long as much till a Sabbath or sermon season came, as a carnal wretch doth till it be gone; but now thy pulse doth not beat so quick a march to the ordinances, public or secret. Nature cannot but decay if appetite to food go away. A craving soul is the thriving soul; such a child that will not let his mother rest, but is frequently crying for the breast.

Secondly, When thou declinest in thy care to perform duties in a spiritual sort, and to preserve the sense of those more inward failings, which in duty none but thyself can check thee of. It is not frequency in duty, but spirituality in duty, causeth thriving; and therefore neglect in this point soon brings grace into a consumptive posture. Possibly, soul, the time was thou wert not satisfied with praying, but thou didst watch thy heart strictly, as a man would every piece in a sum of money he pays, lest he should wrong his friend with any brass or uncurrent coin; thou wouldst have God not only have duty, but duty stamped with that faith which makes it current, have that zeal and sincerity which makes it gospel-weight; but now thou art more careless and formal. Oh, look to it, poor soul! thou wilt, if thou continue thus careless, melt in thy spiritual estate apace; such dealings will spoil thy trade with heaven; God will not take off these flighty duties at thy hands.

Thirdly, When a Christian gets little spiritual nourishment from communion with God to what he hath done. The time hath been, it may be, thou couldst shew what came of thy praying, hearing, and fasting; but now the case is altered. There is a double strength in communion which God imparts to a soul in a healthful disposition; strength to faith, and strength for our obediential walking. Dost thou hear and pray, and get no more strength to hold by a promise; no more power over, or brokenness of heart under, thy usual corruptions? What, come down the mount, and break the tables of God's law as soon as thou art off the place? As deep in thy passion, as uneven in thy course as before? There is a sure decay of that inward heat which should and would, if in his right temper, suck some nourishment from these.

Thirdly, By thy behaviour in thy worldly employments.

First, When thy worldly occasions do not leave thee in so free and spiritual a disposition to return into the presence of God as formerly. It may be thou couldst have come from thy shop and family employments to thy closet, and find that they have kept thee in frame, yea, perhaps delivered thee up in a better frame for those duties; but now it is otherwise, thou canst not so shake

Digitized by Google

them off, but they cleave to thy spirit, and give an earthly savour to thy praying and hearing; thou hast reason to bewail it. When nature decays, men go more stooping; and it is a sign some such decay is in thee, that thou canst not as thou usest lift up thy heart from earthly to spiritual duties. They were intended as helps against temptation; and therefore when they prove snares to us, there is a distemper on us. If we wax worse after sleep, the body is not right, because the nature of sleep is to refresh; if exercise indisposeth for work, the reason is in our bodies. So here,

Secondly, When thy diligence in thy particular calling is more selfish. Possibly thou hast wrought in thy shop, and sat close at thy study, in obedience to the command chiefly; thy carnal interests have swayed but little with thee; but now thou tradest more for thyself, and less for God. Oh, have a care of this!

Thirdly, When thou canst not bear the disappointment of thy carnal ends in thy particular calling, as thou hast done: thou workest and gettest little of the world, thou preachest and art not much esteemed, and thou knowest not well how to brook these. The time was thou couldst retire thyself into God, and make up all thou didst want elsewhere in him; but now thou art not so well satisfied with thy estate, rank, and condition; thy heart is fingering for more of these than God allows thee; this shews declining. Children are harder to be pleased, and old men, (whose decay of nature makes them more forward, and in a manner children the second time,) than others. Labour therefore to recover thy decaying grace; and as this lock grows, so thy strength with it will, to acquiesce in the disposure of God's providence.

CHAPTER IV.

A WORD OF COUNSEL FOR THE RECOVERY OF DECLINING GRACE.

We come now to give a few directions to the Christian, how to recover decaying grace.

Inquire faithfully into the cause of thy declining. The Christian's armour decays two ways; either by violent battery, when the Christian is overcome by temptation to sin, or else by neglecting to furbish and scour it with the use of those means which are as oil to keep it clean and bright. Now inquire which of these have been the cause of thy decay. It is likely both concur.

First, If thy grace be weakened by any blow given it, by any sin committed by thee, there then lies a threefold duty upon thee towards the recovery of it.

First, Thou art to renew thy repectance. It is Christ's counsel, Rev. ii. 5, to Ephesus, 'Repent, and do thy first works;' where it is not only commanded as a duty, but prescribed as a means for her recovery; as if he had said, Repent, that thou mayest do thy first works. Lo, Hos. xiv. 2, the Lord sets backsliding Israel about this work, bidding her 'take words, and turn to the Lord;' and, ver. 4, he then tells her he will take her in hand to recover her of her sins, 'I will heal their backslidings. A repenting soul is under promise of healing; and therefore, Christian, go and search thy heart, as thou wouldst do thy house if some thief or murderer lay hid in it to cut thy throat in the night; when thou hast found the sin that has done thee the mischief, then labour to fill thy heart with shame for it, and indignation against it, and so go big with sorrow, and cast it forth before the Lord in a heartbreaking confession. Better thou do this, than Satan do thy errand to God for thee.

Secondly, When thou hast renewed thy repentance, forget not, delay not then to renew thy faith on the promise for pardon. Repentance, that is like purging physic to evacuate the peccant humour: but if faith come not presently with its restorative, the poor creature will never get heart, or recover his strength. A soul may die of a flux of sorrow, as well as of sin; faith hath an incarnating virtue, as they say of some strengthening meats; it feeds upon the promise, and that is 'perfect, converting,' or rather restoring 'the soul,' Psa. xix. 7. Though thou wert pined to skin and bones, all thy strength wasted, yet faith would soon recruit thee, and enable every grace to perform its office cheerfully. Faith sucks peace from the promise, called 'peace in believing;' from peace flows joy; 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. v. 1; and, ver. 2, 'We rejoice in hope of glory;' and joy affords strength, 'the joy of the Lord is our strength.'

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, Back both these with a daily endeavour to mortify those lusts which most prevail over thy grace. Weeds cannot thrive and the flowers also; when grace doth not act vigorously and freely, conclude it is oppressed with some contrary lust, which weighs down its spirits, and makes them lumpish; even as superfluous humours do load the natural spirits in our bodies, that we have little joy to stir or go about any business till they be evacuated; and therefore ply this work close: it is not a day's work or two in the year, like physic at spring and fall. Nothing more vain than to make a bustle, as the papists do at their Lent, or as some unsound professors among ourselves, who seem to bestir themselves before a sacrament or day of fasting, with a great noise of zeal, and then let those very lusts live peaceably in them all the year after. No, this is child-play, to do and undo; thou must 'mortify daily thy lusts by the Spirit,' Rom. viii. 13. Follow but this work conscientiously in thy Christian course, making it thy endeavour, as constantly as the labouring man goes out every day to work in the field where his calling lies, to watch thy heart, and use all means for the discovery of sin; and as it breaks forth, to be humbled for it, and be chopping at the root of it with the axe of mortification; and thou shalt see, by the blessing of God, what a change for the better there will be in the constitution of thy grace; thou, who art now so poor, so pale, that thou art afraid to see thy own face long in the glass of thy own conscience, thou shalt then reflect with joy upon thy own conscience, and dare to converse with thyself without those surprisals of horror and fear which before did appal thee; thy grace, though it shall not be thy rejoicing, yet it will be thy evidence for Christ, in whom it is, and lead thee in with boldness to lay claim to him; while the loose Christian, whose grace is overgrown with lusts, nor want of this weeding-hook, shall stand trembling at the door, questioning whether his grace be true or no; and from that, doubt of his welcome.

Secondly, If, upon inquiry, thou findest that thy armour decays, rather for want of scouring than by any blow from sin presumptuously committed, (as that is most common and ordinary, rust will soon spoil the best armour, and negligence give grace its bane, as well as gross sins,) then apply thyself to the use of those means which God hath appointed for strengthening grace. If the fire goes out by taking off the wood, what may preserve it but by laying it on again?

First, I shall send thee to the word of God. Be more frequently conversant with it. David tells us where he renewed his spiritual life, and got his soul so oft into a heavenly heat, when grace in him began to chill: 'The word,' he tells us, 'quickened him;' this was the sunny bank he sat under. The word draws forth the Christian's grace, by presenting every one with an object suitable to act upon, this is of great power to rouse them up; as the coming of a friend makes us, though sleepy before, shake off all drowsiness, to enjoy his company. Affections are actuated when their object is before them; if we love a person, this is excited by sight of him; if we hate one, our blood riseth much more against him when before us. Now the word brings the Christian's graces and their objects together. Here love may delight herself with the beholding Christ, who is set out to life there in all his love and loveliness; here the Christian may see his sins in a glass that will not flatter him; and can there any godly sorrow be in the heart, any hatred of sin, and not come forth, while the man is reading what they cost Christ for them?

Secondly, From the word go to meditation; this is a bellows to the fire; that grace which lies chocked and eaten up for want of exercise, will by this be cleared and break forth; while thou art musing this fire will burn, and thy heart grow hot within thee, according to the nature of the subject thy thoughts dwell upon. Resolve therefore, Christian, to inclose some time from all worldly suitors, wherein thou mayest every day, if possible, at least take a view of the most remarkable occurrences that have passed between God and thee. First, ask thy soul what takings it hath had that day, what mercies heaven hath sent in to thee; and do not, when thou hast asked the question, like Pilate, go out but stay till thy soul hath made report of God's gracious dealings with thee And if thou art wise to observe, and faithful to relate them, thy conscience must tell thee that the cock was never turned, the breast of mercy never put up all the day; yea, while thou art viewing these fresh mercies, telling over

Digitized by Google

this new coin, hot out of the mint of God's bounty, ancient mercies will come crowding in upon thee, and call for a place in thy thoughts, and tell thee what God hath done for thee, months and years ago; and, indeed, old debts should not be paid last; give them, Christian, all a hearing one time or another, and thou shalt see how they work upon thy ingenuous spirit. It is with the Christian in this case, as with some merchant's servant that keeps his master's cash; he tells his master he hath a great sum of his by him, and desires he would discharge him of it, and see how his accounts stand; but he can never find him at leisure. There is a great treasure of mercy always in the Christian's hands, and conscience is oft calling the Christian to take the account, and see what God has done for him; but seldom it is he can find time to tell his mercies over; and is it any wonder that such should go behind-hand in their spiritual estate, who take no more notice what the gracious dealings of God are with them? How can he be thankful that seldom thinks of what he receives? or patient when God afflicts, that wants one of the most powerful arguments to pacify a mutinous spirit in trouble, and that is taken from the abundant good we receive at the hands of the Lord, as well as a little evil? How can such a soul's love flame to God that is kept at such a distance from the mercies of God, which are fuel to it? And the like may be said of all the other graces. Secondly, Reflect upon thyself, and bestow a few serious thoughts upon thine own behaviour, what it hath been towards God and man all along the day. Ask thy soul, as Elisha his servant, Whence comest thou, O my soul? Where hast thou been? What hast thou done for God this day; and how? And when thou goest about this, look that thou neither art taken off from a thorough search, as Jacob was by Rachel's specious excuse; nor to be found to excuse thyself, as Eli his sons, when thou shalt upon inquiry take thy heart tardy in any point of duty; take heed what thou doest, for thou judgest for God, who receives the wrong by thy sin, and therefore will do himself justice, if thou wilt not.

Thirdly, From meditation go to prayer: indeed, a soul in meditation is on his way to prayer; that duty leads the Christian to this, and this brings help to that; when the Christian has done his utmost by meditation to excite his graces and chase his spirit into some divine heat, he knows all this is but to lay the wood in order. The fire must come from above to kindle, and this must be fetched by prayer. They say stars have greatest influence when they are in conjunction with the sun; then sure the graces of a saint should never work more powerfully than in prayer, for then he is in the nearest conjunction and communion with God. That ordinance, which hath such power with God, must needs have a mighty influence on ourselves. It will not let God rest, but raiseth him up to his people's succour; and is it any wonder if it be a means to rouse up and excite the Christian's grace? How oft do we see a dark cloud upon David's spirit at the beginning of his prayer, which by that time he is a little warm in his work begins to clear up, and, before he ends, breaks forth into high actings of faith, and acclamations of praise! Only here, Christian, take heed of formal praying, this is as baneful to grace as not praying. A plaster, though proper, and of sovereign virtue, yet if it be laid on cold, may do more hurt than good.

Fourthly, To all the former, join fellowship and communion with the saints thou livest amongst. No wonder to hear a house is robbed that stands far from neighbours. He that walks in communion of saints, he travels in company, he dwells in a city where one house keeps up another, to which Jerusalem is compared. It is observable, concerning the house in whose ruins Job's children were entombed, that a wind came from the wilderness and smote the four corners of it; it seems it stood alone. The devil knows what he does in hindering this great ordinance of communion of saints; in doing this he hinders the progress of grace, yea, brings that which Christians have into a declining, wasting state. The apostle couples these two duties close together; 'to hold fast our profession, and consider one another, and provoke unto love and to good works,' Heb. x. 23, 24. Indeed, it is a dangerous step to apostasy to forsake the communion of saints; hence it is said of Demas, 'he hath left us, and embraced the present world.' O what mischief has Satan done us in these few late years in this one particular! What is become of this communion

Digitized by Google

of saints? Where are two or three to be found that can agree to walk together? Those that could formerly pray together, cannot sit together at their Father's table, can hardly pray one with or one for another; the breath of one Christian is strange to another, that once lay in his bosom. 'This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.'

CHAPTER V.

THE WORDS OPENED, AND WHAT IS MEANT BY THE EVIL DAY.

That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done, &c.

We come to the argument with which the apostle urgeth the exhortation, and that is double.

The first hath respect to the hour of battle, 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.'

The second to the happy issue of the war, which will crown the Christian thus armed, and that is certain victory,' and having done all, to stand.'

First, Of the first, 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.' But what is this evil day? Some take this evil day to comprehend the whole life of a Christian here below in this vale of tears; and then the argument runs thus: take to yourselves the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to persevere to the end of your life, which you will find, as it were, one continued day of trouble and trial Thus Jacob draws a black line over his whole life, 'Few and evil have the days of my life been,' Gen. xlvii. What day shines so fair that overcasts not before night, nay, in which the Christian meets not with some shower or other, enough to deserve the name of an evil day? Every day hath its portion, yea, proportion; 'sufficient is the evil of the day.' We need not borrow and take up sorrows upon use of the morrow, to make up our present load; as we read of daily bread, so of a daily cross, Luke ix. 24, which we are bid to take, not to make; we need not make crosses for ourselves, as we are prone to do, God in his providence will provide one for us; and we are bid to take it up, but we hear nothing of laying it down, till cross and we lie down together; our troubles and our lives are co-existent, live and die together; here when joy comes, sorrow is at its heel; staff and rod go together; Job himself whose prosperity the devil so grudged, and set forth in all his bravery and pomp, Job i. 10, as if his sun had no shadow, hear what account this good man gives of this his most flourishing time, chap. iii. 26: 'I was not in safety neither had I rest, neither was I quiet.' There were some troubles that broke his rest when his bed was, to thinking, soft as heart could wish: even now this good man tosses and tumbles from one side to the other, and is not quiet. If one should have come to Job, and blessed him with his happy condition, and said, Surely, Job, thou couldst be content with what thou hast for thy portion, if thou mightest have all this settled on thee and thy heirs after thee, he would have said, as once Luther, that God should not put him off with these. Such is the saints' state in this bottom, that their very life here, and all the pompous entertainments of it, are their cross, because they detain them from their crown. We need nothing to make our life an evil day, more than our absence from our chief good; which cannot be recompensed by the world, nor enjoyed with it. Only this goodness there is in this evil, that it is short; our life is but an evil day, it will not last long; and sure it was mercy that God hath abridged so much of the term of man's life in these last days, wherein so much of Christ and heaven are discovered, that it would have put the saints' patience hard to it to have known so much of the upper world's glory, and then be kept so long from it as the fathers in the first age were. O comfort one another, Christians, with this! though your life be evil with troubles, yet it is short; a few steps, and you are out of the rain. There is a great difference between a saint, in regard of the evils he meets with, and the wicked; as two travellers riding contrary ways, both taken in the rain and wet, but one rides from the rain, and so is soon out of the shower; but the other rides into the rainy corner, the further he goes, the worse he is. The saint meets with troubles as well as the wicked, but he is soon out of the shower; when death comes, he has fair weather: but as for the wicked, the further he goes the worse: what he meets with here is but a few drops, the great storm is the last. The pouring out of God's

Digitized by Google

wrath shall be in hell, where all the depths of horror are opened, both from above of God's righteous fury, and from beneath of their own accusing and tormenting consciences.

Secondly, Others take the phrase in a more restrained sense, to denote those particular seasons of our life, wherein more especially we meet with afflictions and sufferings. Beza reads it, *tempore adverso*, in the time of our adversity. Though our whole life be evil, if compared with heaven's blissful state; our clearest day, night to that glorious morning; yet, one part of our life compared with another, may be called good, and the other evil, we have our vicissitudes here. The providences of God to his saints here, while on this low bottom of earth, are mixed and party-coloured, as was signified by the 'speckled horses' in Zecheriah's vision, Zech. i. 8. Red and white, peace and war, joy and sorrow, checker our days. Earth is a middle place betwixt heaven and hell, and so is our state here, it partakes of both; we go up hill and down hill, till we get to our journey's end; yea, we find the deepest slough nearest to our Father's house: death, I mean, into which all the other troubles of our life fall, as streams into some great river, and with which they all end, and are swallowed up. This being the comprehensive evil, I conceive, to be meant here, being made remarkable by a double article, *en te emera te ponera*, that day, that evil day, not excluding those other days of tribulation which intervene. These are but so many petty deaths, every one snatching away a piece of our lives with them, or like pages sent before, to usher in this king of terrors that comes behind.

The phrase being opened, let us consider the strength of this first argument, with which the apostle reinforceth his exhortation, of taking to ourselves the whole armour of God, and that consists in three weighty circumstances.

First, The nature and quality of this day of affliction. It is an evil day.

Secondly, The unavoidableness of this evil day of affliction, implied in the form of speech, 'That you may withstand in the evil day.' He shuts out all hope of escaping, as if he had said, You have no way but to withstand; please not yourselves with thoughts of shunning battle; the evil day must come, be you armed or not armed.

Thirdly, The necessity of this armour, 'to withstand.' As we cannot run from it, so not bear up before it, and oppose the force which will be made against us, except clad with armour. These would afford several points, but for brevity we shall lay them together in one conclusion.

CHAPTER VI.

SHEWETH THAT THE DAY OF AFFLICTION IS EVIL, AND IN WHAT RESPECTS; AS ALSO UNAVOIDABLE; AND WHY TO BE PREPARED FOR.

Doct. It behoves every one to arm and prepare himself for the evil day of affliction and death, which unavoidably he must conflict with. The point hath three branches.

First, The day of affliction and death is an evil day.

Secondly, This evil day is unavoidable.

Thirdly, It behoves every one to provide for this evil day.

First, Of the first branch; the day of affliction, especially death, is an evil day. Here we must shew how affliction is evil, and how not.

First, It is not morally or intrinsically evil. If it were evil in this sense, first, God could not be the author of it; his nature is so pure, that no such evil can come from him, any more than the sun's light can make night. But this evil of affliction he voucheth for his own act: 'Against this family do I devise an evil,' Mic. iii. 2. Yea, more, he impropriates it so to himself, as that he will not have us think any can do us evil beside himself. It is the prerogative he glories in, that there is no evil in the city, but it is of his doing, Amos iii. 6. And well it is for the saints, that their crosses are all made in heaven; they would not else be so fitted to their backs as they are. But for the evil of sin, he disowns it with a strict charge, that we lay not this brat, which is begotten by Satan upon our impure hearts, at his door: 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man,' Jam. i. 13.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, If affliction were intrinsically evil, it could in no respect be the object of our desire, which sometimes it is and may be. We are to choose affliction rather than sin, yea, the greatest affliction before the least sin. Moses chose affliction with the people of God, rather than the pleasures of sin for a season. We are bid to rejoice when we fall into divers temptations, that is, afflictions.

But in what respects then may the day of affliction be called evil?

First, As it is grevious to sense. In Scripture, evil is oft put in contradistinction to joy and comfort: 'we look for peace, and behold no good.' A merry heart is called a good heart; a sad spirit, an evil spirit; because nature hath an abhorence to all that opposeth its joy, and this every affliction doth more or less. No affliction, while present, is joyous, but grievous, Heb. x. 11; it hath, like physic, an unpleasing farewell to the sense. Therefore Solomon, speaking of the evil days of sickness, expresseth them to be distasteful to nature, that we shall say, 'We have no pleasure in them.' They take away the joy of our life. Natural joy is a true flower of the sun of prosperity, it opens and shuts with it. It is true indeed, the saints never have more joy than in their affliction, but this comes in upon another score: they have a good God that sends it in, or else they would be as sadly off as others. It is no more natural for comfort to spring from afflictions, than for grapes to grow on thorns, or manna in the wilderness. The Israelites might have looked long enough for such bread, if Heaven had not miraculously rained it down. God chooseth this season, to make the omnipotency of his love the more conspicuous; as Elijah, to add to the miracle, first caused water in abundance to be poured on the wood and sacrifice, so much as to fill the trench, and then bring fire from heaven by his prayer to lick it up. Thus God pours out the flood of affliction upon his children, and then kindles that inward joy in their bosoms which licks up all their sorrow; yea, he makes the very waters of affliction they float on add a further sweetness to the music of their spiritual joy; but still it is God that is good, and affliction that is evil.

Secondly, The day of affliction is an evil day, as it is an unwelcome remembrancer of what sinful evils have passed in our lives. It revives the memory of old sins, which, it may be, were buried many years ago in the grave of forgetfulness. The night of affliction is the time when such ghosts use to walk in men's consciences; and as the darkness of the night adds to the horror of any fearful object, so doth the state of affliction, which is itself uncomfortable, add to the terror of our sins then remembered. Never did the patriarchs' sin look so ghastly on them, as when it recoiled upon them in their distress, Gen. xlii. 21. The sinner then hath more real apprehensions of wrath than at another time: affliction approximates judgment; yea, it is interpreted by him, as a pursuivant sent to call him presently before God, and therefore must beget a woful confusion and consternation in his spirit. Oh that men would but think how they could bear the sight of their sins, and a rehearsal-sermon of all their ways in that day! That is the blessed man indeed, who can with the prophet then look on them, and triumph over them. This indeed is a dark parable, as he calls it, few can understand it; as Psa. xlix. 4, 5: 'I will open my dark saying upon the harp; wherefore should I fear in the day of evil, when the iniquity of my heels compasseth me about?'

Thirdly, The day of affliction makes discovery of much evil to be in the heart, which was not seen before. Affliction shakes and exposes the creature; if any sediment be at the bottom, it will appear then. Sometimes it discovers the heart to be quite naught, that before had some seeming good; these suds wash off the hypocrite's paint. *Natura vexata prodit seipsam*, when corrupt nature is vexed, it shews itself; and some afflictions do that to purpose. We read of such as are offended when persecution comes; they fall quite out with their profession, because it puts them to such cost and trouble; others, in their distress, that curse their God, Isa. viii. 21. It is impossible for a naughty heart to think well of an afflicting God. The hireling, if his master takes up a staff to beat him, throws down his work and runs away; and so doth a false heart serve God. Yea, even where the person is gracious, corruption is oft found to be stronger, and graces weaker, than they were thought to be. Peter, who sets out so valiantly at first to walk on the sea, the wind doth but rise, and he begins to sink: now he sees there was more unbelief in his heart than he before suspected.

Digitized by Google

Sharp afflictions are to the soul as a driving rain to the house; we know not that there are such crannies and holes in the house, till we see it drop down here and there. Thus we perceive not how unmortified this corruption, not how weak that grace is, till we are thus searched, and made more fully to know what is in our hearts by such trials. This is the reason why none have such humble thoughts of themselves, and such pitful and forbearing thoughts towards others in their infirmities, as those who are most acquainted with afflictions; they meet with so many foils in their conflicts, as make them carry a low sail in respect of their own grace, and a tender respect to their brethren, more ready to pity than censure them in their weaknesses.

Fourthly, This is the season when the evil one, Satan, comes to tempt. What we find called the time of tribulation, Matt. xiii. 22, we find in the same parable. Luke viii. 13, called the time of temptation. Indeed, they both meet; seldom doth God afflict us, but Satan addeth temptation to our wilderness: 'This is your hour,' saith Christ, 'and the power of darkness,' Luke xxii. 53. Christ's sufferings from man, and temptation from the devil, came together. Esau, who hated his brother for the blessing, said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand, then will I kill my brother,' Gen. xxviii. 41. Times of affliction are the days of mourning; those Satan waits to do us a mischief in.

Fifthly and lastly, The day of affliction hath oft an evil event and issue, and in this respect proves an evil day indeed. All is well, we say, that ends well; the product of afflictions on the Christian is good; the rod with which they are corrected yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and therefore they can call their afflictions good; that is a good instrument that lets out only the bad blood: 'It was good for me that I was afflicted,' saith David. I have read of a holy woman who used to compare her afflictions to her children; they both put her to great pain in the bearing: but as she knew not which of her children to have been without, for all the trouble in the bringing forth, so neither which of her afflictions she could have missed, notwithstanding the sorrow they put her to in the enduring. But to the wicked the issue is sad: first, in regard of sin, they leave them worse, more impenitent, hardened in sin, and outrageous in their wicked practices. Every plague on Egypt added to the plague of hardness on Pharaoh's heart: he that for some while could beg prayers of Moses for himself, at last comes to that pass that he threatens to kill him if he came to him any more. Oh, what a prodigious height do we see many come to in sin, after some great sickness or other judgment! Children do not more shoot up in their bodily stature after an ague, than they in their lusts after afflictions. Oh, how greedy and ravenous are they after their prey, when they once get off their clog and chain from their heels! When physic works not kindly, it doth not only leave the disease uncured, but the poison of the physic stays in the body also. Many appear thus poisoned by their afflictions, by the breaking out of their lusts afterwards. Secondly, In regard of sorrow; every affliction on a wicked person produceth another, and that a greater than itself: the greatest wedge comes at last, which shall cleave him fit for the fire. The sinner is whipped from affliction to affliction, as a vagrant from constable to constable, till at last he comes to hell, his proper place and settled abode, where all sorrows will meet in one that is endless.

The second branch of the point follows. The evil day is unavoidable: we may as well stop the chariot of the sun, when posting to night, and chase away the shades of the evening, as escape this hour of darkness that is coming upon us all. 'None hath power over the spirit to retain it, neither hath he power in the body of death, and there is no discharge in that war,' Eccl. viii. 8. Among men it is possible to get off when pressed for the wars, by pleading privilege of years, estate, weakness of body, protection from the prince, and the like; or if all these fail, possibly, the sending another in our room, or a bribe given in the hand, may serve the turn; but in this war the press is so strict, that there is no dispensation. David could willingly have gone for his son: we hear him crying, 'Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!' But he will not be taken, that young gallant must go himself. We must in our own person come into the field, and look death in the face. Some indeed we find so fond as to promise themselves immunity from this day, as if they had an insuring-office in their breast; they say they have made a covenant with death

Digitized by Google

and with hell they are at an agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto them; and now, like debtors, they have feed the sergeant, they walk abroad boldly, and fear no arrest. But God tells them, as fast as they bind he will loose: 'Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand.' And how should it, if God will not set his seal to it? There is a divine law for this evil day, which came in force upon Adam's first sin, that laid the fatal knife to the throat of mankind, which hath opened a sluice to let out his heart-blood ever since. God, to prevent all escape, hath sown the seeds of death in our very constitution and nature, so that we can as soon run from ourselves as from death. We need no feller to come with a hand of violence and hew us down; there is in the tree a worm which grows out of its own substance, that will destroy it; so in us, those infirmities of nature that will bring us down to the dust. Our death was bred when our life was first conceived; and as a breeding woman cannot hinder the hour of her travail, that follows in nature upon the other, so neither can man hinder the bringing forth of death, with which his life is big. All the pains and aches man feels in his life are but so many *singultus morientis naturæ*, groans of dying nature; they tell him his dissolution is at hand. Art thou a prince, sitting in all thy state and pomp, death dare enter thy palace, and come through all thy guards, to deliver the fatal message it hath from God to thee; yea, run its dagger to thy heart. Wert thou compassed with a college of doctors, consulting thy health, art and nature both must deliver thee up when that comes. Even when thy strength is firmest, and thou eatest thy bread with a merry heart, that very food which nourishes thy life gives thee withal an earnest of thy death, as it leaves those dregs in thee which will in time procure the same. Oh, how unavoidable must this evil day of death be, when that very staff knocks us down to the grave at last, which our life leans on, and is preserved by! God owes a debt both to the first Adam and second; to the first he owes the wages of his sin; to the second the reward of his sufferings. The place for full payment of both is the other world; so that except death comes to convey man thither, the wicked, who are the posterity of the first Adam, will miss that full pay for their sins which the threatenings makes due debt, and engageth God to perform: the godly, also, who are the seed of Christ, these should not receive the whole purchase of his blood, which he would never have shed but upon credit of that promise of eternal life which God gave him for them before the world began. This is the reason why God hath made this day so sure; in it he dischargeth both bonds.

The third branch of the point follows, That it behoves every one to prepare and effectually to provide for this evil day, which so unavoidably impends over us: and that upon a twofold account; First, in point of duty; Secondly, in point of wisdom.

First, In point of duty. First, It is upon our allegiance to the great God that we provide and arm ourselves against this day. Suppose a subject were trusted with one of his prince's castles, and this man should hear that a puissant enemy was coming to lay siege to this castle, yet takes no care to lay in arms and provisions for his defence, and so it is lost; how could such a one be cleared of treason? Doth he not basely betray the place, and with it his prince's honour, into his enemies' hand? Our souls are this castle, which we are every one to keep for God. We have certain intelligence that Satan hath a design upon them, and the time when he intends to come with all his powers of darkness, to be that evil day. Now, as we should be found true to our trust, we are obliged to stand upon our defence, and store ourselves with what may enable us to make a vigorous resistance.

Secondly, We are obliged to provide for that day, as a suitable return for, and improvement of the opportunities and means which God affords us for this very end. We cannot, without shameful ingratitude to God, make waste of those helps God gives us in order to this great work. Every one would cry out upon him that should basely spend that money upon riot in prison, which was sent him to procure his deliverance out of prison: and do we not blush to bestow those talents upon our lusts and Satan, which God graciously indulgeth to deliver us from them, and his rage in a dying hour? What have we Bibles for, ministers and preaching for, if we mean not to furnish ourselves by them with armour for the evil day? In a word, what is the intent of God in lengthening

Digitized by Google

out our days, and continuing us some while here in the land of the living? Was it that we might have time to revel, or rather revel out upon the pleasure of this vain world? Doth he give us our precious time to be employed in catching such butterflies as these earthly honours and riches are? It cannot be. Masters do not use, if wise, to set their servants about such work as will not pay for the candle they burn in doing it. And truly nothing less than the glorifying of God, and saving our souls at last, can be worth the precious time we spend here. The great God hath a greater end than most men think in this dispensation: if we would judge aright, we should take his own interpretation of his actions; and the apostle Peter bids us 'count that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation,' 2 Pet. iii. 15; which place he quotes out of Paul, as to the sense, though not in the same form of words, which in Rom. ii. 4, are these: 'Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?' From both places we are taught what is the mind of God, and in this language he speaks to us by every moment's patience and inch of time that is granted to us. It is a space given for repentance. God sees, that as we are, death and judgment could bring no good news to us; we are in no case to welcome the evil days and therefore mercy stands up to plead for the poor creature in God's bosom, and begs a little more time may be added to his life, that by this indulgence he may be provoked to repent before he be called to the bar. Thus we come by every day that is continually superadded to our time on earth; and doth not this lay a strong obligation on us to lay out every point of this time unto the same end it is begged for?

Secondly, In point of wisdom. The wisdom of a man appears most eminently in two things.

First, In the matter of his choice and chief care.

Secondly, In a due time of this his choice and care.

First, A wise man makes choice of that for the subject of his chief care and endeavour, which is of the greatest importance and consequence to him: fools and children only are intent about toys and trifles; they are as busy and earnest in making of a house of dirt or cards, as Solomon was in making of his temple. Those poor babes are as adequate to their foolish apprehensions, as great enterprises are to wise men. Now such is the importance of the evil day, especially that of death, that it proves a man a fool, or wise, as he comports himself to it. The end specifies every action, and gives it the name of good or evil, of wise or foolish. The solemn day of death is, as the end of our days, to be the end of all the actions of our life. Such will our life be found at last, as it hath been in order to this one day. If the several items of our life, counsels and projects that we have pursued, when they shall then be cast up, will amount to a blessed death, then we shall appear to be wise men indeed: but if, after all our goodly plots and policies for other things, we be unprovided for that hour, we must be content to die fools at last; and no such fool as the dying fool. The Christian goes for the fool, in the world's account, while he lives; but when death comes, the wise world will then confess they miscalled him, and shall take it to themselves. 'We fools counted his life to be madness, and his end to be without honour: but how is he now numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! therefore have we erred from the way of truth,' Wisd. v. 4, 5. The words are apocryphal, but sinners will find the matter of them canonical. It is true indeed, saints are outwitted by the world in the things of the world, and no marvel; neither doth it impeach their wisdom any more than it doth a scholar's to be excelled by the cobbler in his mean trade. Nature, where it intends higher excellences, is more careless in those things that are inferior; as we see in man, who, being made to excel the beasts in a rational soul, is himself excelled by some beast or other in all his senses. Thus the Christian may well be surpassed in matters of worldly commerce, because he hath a nobler object in his eye, that makes him converse with the things of the world in a kind of non-attendance; he is not much careful in these matters: if he can die well at last, and be justified for a wise man at the day of the resurrection, all is well; he thinks it not manners to be unwilling to stay so long for the clearing of his wisdom, as God can wait for the vindication of his own glorious nature, which will not appear in its glory till that day, when he will convince the

Digitized by Google

ungodly of their hard thoughts and speeches against him, Jude 15. Then they shall, and till then they will not, be convinced.

Secondly, A wise man labours duly to time his care and endeavour for the attaining of what he proposeth. It is the fool that comes when the market is done: as the evil day is of great concernment in respect of its event, so the placing of our care for it in the right season is of chief importance, and that sure must be before it comes. There are more doors than one at which the messenger may enter that brings evil tidings to us, and at which he will knock we know not; we know not where we shall be arrested, whether at bed or board, whether at home or in the field, whether among our friends, that will counsel and comfort us, or among our enemies, that will add weight to our sorrow by their cruelty. We know not when, whether by day or night; many of us, not whether in the morning, noon, or evening of our age. As he calls to work at all times of the day, so he doth to bed; it may be while thou art praying or preaching, and it would be sad to go away profaning them and the name of God in them; possibly when thou art about worse work; death may strike thy quaffing-cup out of thy hand, while thou art sitting in the alehouse with thy jovial mates, or meet thee as thou art reeling home, and make some ditch thy grave, that as thou livedst like a beast, so thou shouldst die like a beast. In a word, we know not the kind of evil God will use as the instrument to stab us; whether some bloody hand of violence shall do it, or a disease out of our bowels and bodies; whether some acute disease, or some lingering sickness; whether such a sickness as shall slay the man while the body is alive, I mean, take the head and deprive us of our reason, or not; whether such noisome troubles as shall make our friends afraid to let us breathe on them, or themselves look on us; whether they shall be afflictions aggravated with Satan's temptations, and the terrors of our own affrighted consciences, or not. Who knows where, when, or what the evil day shall be? Therefore doth God conceal these that we should provide for all. Cæsar would never let his soldiers know when or whither he meant to march. The knowing of these would torment us with distracting fear; the not knowing them should awaken us to a providing care. It is an ill time to caulk the ship when at sea, tumbling up and down in a storm; this should have been looked to when on her seat in the harbour. And as bad it is to begin to trim a soul for heaven, when tossing on a sick bed. Things that are done in a hurry are seldom done well: a man called out of his bed at midnight, with a dismal fire on his house-top, cannot stand to dress himself in order as at another time, but runs down with one stocking half on, may be, and the other not on at all. Those poor creatures, I am afraid, go in as ill a dress into another world, who begin to provide for it when on a dying bed: conscience calls them up with a cry of hell-fire in their bosoms; but, alas! they must go, though they have not time to put their armour on; and so they are put to repent at leisure in hell of their shuffling up a repentance in haste here. We come to the application of the point.

CHAPTER VII.

THE APPLICATION OF THE POINT.

Use 1.—It reproves those that are so far from providing for the evil day, that they will not suffer any thoughts of that day to stay with them; they are as unwilling to be led into a discourse of this subject, as a child is to be carried into the dark, and there left: it is a death to them to think of death, or that which leads to it. As some foolishly think, they must needs die presently when they have made their will, so these think they hasten that sorrowful day by musing on it. The meditation of it is no more welcome to them, than the company of Moses was to Pharaoh: therefore, they say to it, as he to Moses, 'Get thee from me, and let me see thy face no more.' The fear of it makes them to butcher and make away all those thoughts which conscience stirs up concerning it: and at last they get such a mastery of their consciences, that they arrive to a kind of atheism; it is as rare to have them think or speak of such matters, as to see a fly busy in winter; nothing now but what is frolicsome and jocund is entertained by them. If any such thoughts come as prophesy mirth, and carnal content, these, as right with their hearts, are taken up into the

Digitized by Google

chariot to sit with them, but all other are commanded to go behind. Alas, poor-spirited wretches! something might be said for you, if this evil day of death and judgment were such *entia rationis* as had no foundation or being but what our fancy gives them. Such troubles there are in the world, which have all their evil from our thoughts; when we are disquieted with the scorns and reproaches of men, did we but not think of them, they were nothing; but thy banishing the thoughts of this evil day from thy mind will be a poor, short relief. Thou canst neither hinder its coming, nor take away its sting when it comes by the slighting it. Thou art like a passenger in a ship, sleep or awake thou art going thy voyage. Thou dost but like that silly bird, who puts her head into a reed, and then thinks she is safe from the fowler because she sees him not. Thou art a fair mark for God's vengeance; he sees thee, and is taking his aim at thee, when thou seest him not; yea, thou puttest thyself under an inevitable necessity of perishing by not thinking of this day. The first step to our safety is consideration of our danger.

Use 2.—It reproves those, who if they think of the evil day, yet it is so far off, that it is to little purpose. They will be sure to set it at such a distance from them as shall take away the force of the meditation, that it shall not strike them down in the deep sense and fear of it. That cannon, which if we stood at the mouth of it, would scatter us limb from limb, will not so much as scare them that get out of its reach. The further we put the evil day, the weaker impression it makes on us. It is true, say sinners, it cannot be helped; we owe a debt to nature, it must be paid: sickness will come, and death follow on that, and judgment brings up the rear of both. But, alas! they look not for these guests yet; they prophesy of these things a great while hence to come; many a fair day they hope will intervene. Thus men are very kind to themselves: first they wish it may be long before it comes; and then because they would have it so, they are bold to promise themselves it shall be so; and when once they have made this promise, no wonder if they then live after the rate of their vain hopes, putting off the stating of their accounts till the winter evening of old age, when they shall not have such allurements to gad abroad from the pleasures of this life. O then they will do great matters to fit them for the evil day! Bold man! who gave thee leave to cut out such large thongs of that time which is not thine, but God's? Who makes the lease? the tenant or the landlord? Or dost thou forget thou farmest thy life, and art not an owner? This is the device of Satan to make you delay; whereas a present expectation of the evil day would not let you sit still unprepared. Oh, why do you let your souls from their work, make them idle and rest from their burdens, by telling them of long life, while death chops in upon you unawares? And let me tell you, sudden destruction is threatened, especially to such secure ones. Read Matt. xxiv. 48, 50, 51, where it is denounced against that sort of sinners who please themselves with their Lord's delaying his coming, that 'the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of.' Indeed, God must go out of his ordinary road of dealing with sinners if such escape sudden ruin. One is bold to challenge any to shew a precedent in Scripture of any that are branded for security, that some remarkable, yea, sudden judgment did not surprise. Sodom, how soon after a sunshine morning did the heavens thicken, and bury them in a few hours, by a storm of fire, in their own ashes! Careless Laish cut off before they almost think of it. Agag, when he saw the clouds of his fears break, and fair weather was in his countenance, they return immediately upon him, and shut him up in death; he is presently hewn in pieces. Amalek slaughtered by David before the triumph of their late victory was cold. Nebuchadnezzar strutting himself in his palace with this bravado in his mouth, 'Is not this great Babylon which I have built?' and before he can get the words out of his throat, there is another voice, falling from heaven, saying, 'O king, to thee be it spoken, thy kingdom is departed from thee,' Dan. iv. 31, 33. 'And the same hour it was fulfilled,' and he sent to graze with the beasts. Dives blessing himself for many years, and within a few hours the pillow is plucked from under his head, and you hear no more of him, till out of hell he roar. Yea, a whole world, few persons excepted, drowned, and they not know till the day the flood came,

Digitized by Google

Matt. xxiv. 39, and swept them all away. And who art thou, O man, that promises thyself an exemption, when kings, cities, a whole world have been ruined after this sort?

Use 3.—This reproves those who indeed think oft of this evil day, much against their will, by reason of an awakened conscience, that is ever pinching them, and preaching on Paul's text before Felix to them, till it makes them tremble as he did; yet such is the power of lusts in their hearts, that it makes them spur on, notwithstanding all the rebukes conscience gives them, and affrighting thoughts they have of the evil day; yet they continue their old trade of sin desperately. The secure sinner, that has broke prison from his conscience, is like a strong-brained drunkard; he swallows down his sin, as the other does his drink, with pleasure, and is not stirred at all. But here is a man that is stomach-sick, as I may so say; his conscience is oft disgorging his sweet draughts, and yet he will sin, though with pain and anguish. O consider, poor wretches, what you do; instead of arming yourselves against the evil day, you arm the evil day against yourselves; you are sticking the bed with pins and needles, on which you must ere long be laid; you are throwing billets into that fiery furnace, wherein at last you shall be cast: and all this in spite of your consciences, which God mercifully sets in your way, that the pricking of them may be as a hedge of thorns, to keep thee from the pursuit of thy lusts. Know, therefore, if thou wilt go on, that as thy conscience takes from the pleasures of thy sin at present, so it will add to the horror of thy torment hereafter.

Use 4.—It reproves those who, though they are not so violent and outrageous in sin, to make them stink above ground in the nostrils of others, yet rest in an unarmed condition; they do not fly to Christ for covering and shelter against this day of storm and tempest; and the reason is, they have a lie in their right hand: they feed on ashes, and a deceived heart carries them aside from seeking after Christ. It would make one tremble to see how confident many are with their false hopes and self-confidences, daring to come up, as Korah, with his censer, as undauntedly as Moses himself, even to the mouth of the grave, till on a sudden they are swallowed up with destruction, and sent to be undeceived in hell, who would not be beaten from their refuge of lies here. Whoever thou art, O man, and whatever thou hast to glory in, were it the most saint-like conversation that ever any lived on earth, yet if this be thy shelter against the evil day, thou wilt perish. No salvation when that flood comes, but Christ, yea, being in Christ, hanging on the outside of the ark by a specious profession, will not save. Methinks I see how those of the old world ran for their lives, some to this hill, and others to that high tree: and how the waves pursued them, till at last they were swept into the devouring flood. Such will your end be that turn any other way for help than to Christ; yet the ark waits on you, yea, comes up close to your gate to take you in. Noah did not put forth his hand more willing to take in the dove, than Christ doth to receive those who fly to him for refuge. Oh, reject not your own mercies for lying vanity!

Use 5.—Let this put thee upon the inquiry, whoever thou art, whether thou art in a posture of defence for this evil day. Ask thy soul, soberly and solemnly, Art thou provided for this day, this evil day? How couldst thou part with what that will take away, and welcome what it will certainly bring? Death comes with a warrant to carry away all thy carnal enjoyments, and to bring thee up a reckoning for them. Oh, canst thou take thy leave of the one, and with peace and confidence read the other? Will it not affright thee to have thy health and strength turned into faintness and feebleness; thy sweet nights of rest into waking eyes, and restless tossings up and down; thy voice, that has so often chanted to the viol, to be now acquainted to no other tune but sighs and groans? Oh, how canst thou look upon thy sweet and dear relations with thoughts of removing from them? yea, behold the instrument, as it were whetting, that shall give the fatal stroke to sever soul and body? Think that thou wert now half dead in thy members, that are most remote from the fountain of life, and death to have but a few moments' journey, before it arrives to thy heart, and so beat thy last breath out of thy body. Possibly the inevitab

Digitized by Google

necessity of these do make thee to harden thyself against them; this might indeed in some heathen, that is not resolved whether there be another world or no, help a little to blunt the edge of that terror, which otherwise would cut deeper into his amazed heart. But if thou believest another world, and that judgment which stands at death's back, ready to allot thee thy unchangeable state in bliss or misery; surely thou canst not relieve thy awakened conscience with such a poor cordial. Oh, therefore, think what answer thou meanest to give unto the great God, at thy appearing before him, when he shall ask thee what thou canst say why the sentence of eternal damnation should not then be pronounced against thee. Truly, we deal unfaithfully with our own souls, if we bring not our thoughts to this issue. If now you should ask, how you should provide against the evil day, so that you may stand before that dreadful bar, and live so in the mean time that you might not be under a slavish bondage through the fearful expectation of it; take it in a few directions.

First, If ever you would have a blessed issue of this evil day, so as to stand in judgment before the great God, rest not till thou hast got into a covenant-relation with Christ. Dying David's living comfort was drawn from the covenant God had made with him; this was all his desire, and all his salvation. How canst thou put thy head into the other world without horror, if thou hast not solid ground that Christ will own thee for his? Heaven hath its proper heirs, and so hath hell. The heirs of heaven are such as are in the covenant with God: the foundation of it was laid in a covenant, and all the mansions there are prepared for a people in covenant with him; 'Gather my saints together that have made a covenant with me.' But how mayest thou get into this covenant-relation? First, Break thy covenant with sin: thou art by nature a covenant-servant to sin and Satan; may be thou hast not expressly in words and formally, as witches, sealed this covenant; yet virtually, as thou hast done the work of Satan, and been at the command of thy lusts, accepting the reward of unrighteousness (the pleasure and carnal advantages they have paid thee in for the same), therein thou hast declared thyself to be so. Now, if ever thou wilt be taken into covenant with God, break this: a covenant with hell and heaven cannot stand together.

Secondly, Betroth thyself to Christ. The covenant of grace is the jointure which God settles only upon Christ's spouse. Rebecca had not the jewels and costly raiment till she was promised to become Isaac's wife, Gen. xxiv. 53. 'All the promises are yea and amen in Christ.' If once thou receivest Christ, with him thou receivest them. He that owns the tree hath right to all the fruit that is on it. Now that thou mayest not huddle up a marriage between Christ and thee, so as to be disowned of Christ, and it prove a nullity at last, it behoves thee to look to it that there be found in thee what Christ expects in every soul that he espouseth. First, therefore, consider whether thou canst heartily love the person of Christ. Look wishfully on him again and again, as he is set forth in all his spiritual excellencies; are they such as thy heart can close with? Doth his holy nature, and all those heavenly graces with which he is beautified, render him desirable to thee? or couldst thou like him better if he were not so precise and exactly holy? Yea, is thy heart so inflamed with a desire of him that thou canst love him with a conjugal love? A woman may love one as a friend, whom she cannot love so as to make him her husband. A friendly love may stand with a love of some other equal to it, yea, superior; but a conjugal love is such as will bear neither. Canst thou find in thy heart to forsake all other, and cleave to Christ? Does thy heart speak thee ready, and present thee willing, to go with thy sweet Jesus, though he carry thee from father and father's house? Is thy confidence such of his power to protect thee from all thy enemies, sin, wrath, and hell, that thou canst resolvedly put the life of thy soul into his hands, to be saved by the sole virtue of his blood, and the strength of his omnipotent arm; and of his care to provide for thee for this life and the other, that thou canst acquiesce in what he promiseth to do for thee? In a word, if thou hast Christ, thou must not only love him, but for his sake all thy new kindred, which by thy marriage to him thou shalt be allied unto. How canst thou fancy to call the saints thy brethren? Canst thou love them heartily, and forget all the old grudges thou hast had against them? Some

Digitized by Google

of them thou wilt find poor and persecuted, yet Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren, neither must thou. If thou findest thy heart now in such a disposition as suits these interrogatories, I dare not deny the banns; yea, I dare not but pronounce Christ and thee husband and wife. Go, poor soul (if I may call so glorious a bride poor), go and comfort thyself with the expectation of thy Bridegroom's coming for thee; and when the evil day approaches, and death itself draws nigh, look not now with terror upon it, but rather revive with old Jacob, to see the chariot which shall carry thee over unto the embraces of thy Husband, whom thou hearest to be in so great honour and majesty in heaven, as may assure thee he is able to make thee welcome when thou comest there. Amongst the 'all things' which are ours by being Christ's, the apostle forgets not to name this to be one, 'death is ours:' and well he did so, or else we should never have looked upon it as a gift, but rather as a judgment. Now, soul, thou art out of any danger of hurt that the evil day can do thee. Yet there remains something for thee to do, that thou mayest walk in the comfortable expectation of the evil day. We see that gracious persons may, for want of a holy care, fall into such distempers, as may put a sting into their thoughts of the evil day. David, that at one time would not fear 'to walk in the valley of the shadow of death,' is so affrighted at another time, when he is led towards it, that he cries, 'Spare me, O Lord, that I may recover my strength, before I go hence,' Psa. xxxix. The child, though he loves his father, may do that which may make him afraid to go home. Now, Christian, if thou wouldst live in a comfortable expectation of the evil day,

First, Labour to die to this life, and the enjoyments of it, every day, more and more. Death is not so strong to him, whose natural strength has been wasted by long pining sickness, as it is to him that lies but a few days, and has strength of nature to make great resistance. Truly, thus it is here: that Christian, whose love to this life and the contents of it hath been for many years consuming and dying, will with more facility part with them, than he whose love is stronger to them. All Christians are not mortified in the same degree to the world. Paul tells us he died daily, he was ever sending more and more of his heart out of the world; so that by that time he came to die, all his affections were packed up and gone, which made him the more ready to follow: 'I am ready to be offered up,' 2 Tim. iv. 6. If it be but a tooth to pull out, the faster it stands, the more pain we have to draw it. O loosen the roots of thy affections from the world, and the tree will fall more easily.

Secondly, Be careful to approve thyself with diligence and faithfulness to God in thy place and calling. The clearer thou standest in thy own thoughts, concerning the uprightness of thy heart in the tenure of thy Christian course, the more composure thou wilt have when the evil day comes. 'I beseech thee, O Lord,' saith good Hezekiah at the point of death, as he thought, 'remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.' This cannot be our confidence, but it will be a better companion than a scolding conscience: if the blood be bad, the spirits will be tainted also: the more our life hath been corrupted with hypocrisy and unfaithfulness, the weaker our faith will be in a dying hour. There is great difference between two children that come home at night; one from the field, where he hath been diligent and faithful about his father's work, and another that hath played the truant a great part of the day; the former comes in confidently to stand before his father, the other sneaks to bed, and is afraid his father should see him, or ask him where he hath been. O, sirs, look to your walking: these have been trying times as ever came to England: it has required more care and courage to keep sincerity than formerly. And that is the reason why it is so rare to find Christians, especially those whose place and calling hath been more in the wind of temptation, go off the stage at death with such a plaudit of inward peace in their bosoms.

Thirdly, Familiarize the thoughts of the evil day to thy soul; handle this serpent often; walk daily in the serious meditations of it; do not run from them because they are unpleasing to flesh: that is the way to increase the terror of it. Do with your souls, when shy of, and scared with the thoughts of affliction or death, as you use to do with your beast that is given to boggle and start as you

Digitized by Google

ride on him: when he flies back and starts at a thing, you do not yield to his fear and go back, that will make him worse another time; but you ride him up close to that which he is afraid of, and in time you break him of that quality. The evil day is not such a terrific thing to thee that art a Christian, as that thou shouldest start at it. Bring up thy heart close to it; show thy soul what Christ hath done to take the sting out of it; what the sweet promises are that are given on purpose to overcome the fear of it, and what thy hopes are thou shalt get by it. These will satisfy and compose thy spirit; whereas the shunning the thoughts of it will but increase thy fear, and bring thee more into bondage to it.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT WITH WHICH THE EXHORTATION IS PRESSED, DRAWN FROM THE ASSURED VICTORY WHICH SHALL CROWN THE SOUL'S CONFLICT, IF IN THIS ARMOUR, WHERE SEVERAL POINTS COUCHED IN THE ARGUMENT ARE BRIEFLY HANDLED.

We come now to the second argument the apostle useth, further to press the exhortation; and that is taken from the glorious victory which hovers over the heads of believers while in the fight, and shall surely crown them in the end; this is held forth in these words, 'And having done all, to stand.' The phrase is short, but full.

SECTION I.—First observe, Heaven is not won with good works and a fair profession, 'Having done all.' The doing Christian is the man that shall stand when the empty boaster of his faith shall fall. The great talkers of religion art oft the least doers. His religion is in vain, whose profession brings not letters testimonial from a holy life. Sacrifice without obedience is sacrilege. Such rob God of that which he makes most account of. A great captain once smote one of his soldiers for railing at his enemy; saying, that he called him not to rail on him, but to fight against him and kill him. It is not crying out upon the devil, and declaiming against sin in prayer or discourse, but fighting and mortifing it, that God looks chiefly upon; such a one else doth but beat the air: there are no marks to be seen on his flesh and unmortified lusts that he hath fought. Paul was in earnest; he left a witness upon his body, made black and blue with the strokes of mortification. It was not a little vapouring in sight of the Philistines that got David his wife, but shedding their blood: and is it so small a matter to be son to the king of heaven, that thou thinkest to obtain it without giving a real proof of thy zeal for God, and hatred to sin? 'Not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word; this man,' saith the apostle, 'shall be blessed in his deeds,' Jam. i. 25. Mark, not by his deed, but in his deed; he shall meet blessedness in that way of obedience he walks in. The empty professor disappoints others, who seeing his leaves, expect fruit, but find none; and at last he disappoints himself, he thinks to reach heaven, but shall miss of it. Tertullian speaks of some that think, *Satis Deum habere, si corde et animo suspiciater, licet actu minus fiat:* God hath enough, they think, if he be feared and reverenced in their hearts, though in their actions they shew it not so much, and therefore they can sin, and believe in God, and fear him never the worse: this, saith he, is to play the adulteress, and yet be chaste; to prepare poison for one's father, and yet be dutiful: but let such know, saith the same father, that if they can sin and believe, God will pardon them with a contradicton also; he will forgive them, but they shall be turned into hell for all that. As ever you would stand at last, look you be found doing the work your Lord hath left you to make up, and trust not to lying words, as the prophet speaks, Jer. vii.

SECTION II.—*Doct.* 2. Secondly observe, That such is the mercy of God in Christ to his children, that he accepts their weak endeavours, joined with sincerity and perseverance in his service, as if they were full obedience; and therefore they are here said to have 'done all.' O, who would not serve such a Lord! You hear servants sometimes complain of their masters to be so rigid and strict, that they can never please them; no, not when they do their utmost: but this cannot be charged upon God. Be but so faithful as to do thy best, and God is so gracious that he will pardon thy worst. David knew this gospel

Digitized by Google

indulgence, when he said, 'Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect to all thy commandments,' Psa. cxix. 6, when my eyes is to all thy commandments. The traveller hath his eye on or towards the place he is going to, though he be but yet short of it; there he would be, and is putting on all he can to reach it: so stands the saint's heart to all the commands of God; he presseth on to come nearer and nearer to full obedience; such a soul shall never be put to shame. But woe to those that cover their sloth with the name of infirmity, yea, that spend their zeal and strength in the pursuit of the world or their lusts, and then think to make all up when charged therewith, that it is their infirmity, and they can serve God no better. These do by God as those two by their prince, (Francis I. of France,) who cut off their right hand one for another, and then made it an excuse they were lame, and so could not serve in his galleys; for which they were sent to the gallows. Thus many will be found at last to have disabled themselves, by refusing that help the Spirit hath offered to them; yea, wasted what they had given them, and so shall be rewarded for hypocrites as they are. God knows how to distinguish between the sincerity of a saint, in the midst of his infirmities, and the shifts of a false heart. But we will wave these, and briefly speak to four points, which lie clear in the words.

First, Here is the necessity of perseverance: 'Having done all.'

Secondly, Here is the necessity of divine armour, to preserve till we have done all. Wherefore else bids he them take this armour for this end, if they could do without?

Thirdly, Here is the certainty of persevering and overcoming at last, if clad with this armour else it were small encouragement to bid them take that armour which would not surely defend them.

Fourthly, Here is the blessed result of the saints' perseverance propounded, as that which will abundantly recompense all their pain and patience in the war; having done all, 'to stand.' From these follow four distinct points.

First, He that will be Christ's soldier must persevere.

Secondly, There can be no perseverance without true grace in the heart.

Thirdly, Where true grace is, that soul shall persevere.

Fourthly, To stand at the end of this war, will abundantly recompense all our hazard and hardship endured in the war.

Section III.—*Doct.* 1. He that will be Christ's soldier must persevere to the end of his life in this war against Satan. This 'having done all' comes in after our conflict with death: 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.' Then follows, 'And having done all.' We have not done all till that pitched battle be fought. 'The last enemy is death.' The word *Katergazestai* imports as much as to finish a business, and bring a matter to a full issue; so Phil. ii. 12, where we translate it well, 'work out your salvation;' that is, perfect it, be not Christians by halves, but go through with it; the thorough Christian is the true Christian. Not he that takes the field, but he that keeps the field; not he that sets out, but he that holds out in this holy war, deserves the name of a saint. There is not such a thing in this sense belonging to Christianity as an honourable retreat; not such a word of command, in all Christ's military discipline, as, Fall back, and lay down your arms: no, you must fall on, and stand to your arms, till called off by death.

First, we are under a covenant and oath to do this. Formerly soldiers used to take an oath not to flinch from their colours, but faithfully to cleave to their leaders; this they called *sacramentum militaire*, a military oath; such an oath lies upon every Christian. It is so essential to the being of a saint that they are described by this, Psa. l. 5: 'Gather my saints together, those that have made a covenant with me.' We are not Christians till we have subscribed this covenant, and that without any reservation. When we take upon us the profession of Christ's name, we enlist ourselves in his muster-roll, and by it do promise, that we will live and die with him in opposition to all his enemies. 'Every nation will walk in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of our God.' And what is it to walk in the name of our God, but to fight under the banner of his gospel, wherein his name is displayed, by giving an eternal defiance to sin and Satan? If a captain had not such a tie on his soldiers, he might have them to seek when the day of battle comes. Therefore, Christ tells us upon what terms he will enrol us among his disciples: 'If any man will be

Digitized by Google

my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.' He will not entertain us, till we resign up ourselves freely to his disposal, that there may be no disputing with his commands afterwards, but, as one under his authority, go and come at his word.

Secondly, Perseverance is necessary, because our enemy perseveres to oppose us. There is no truce in the devil's heart, no cessation of arms in our enemy's camp. If an enemy continue to assault a city, and they within cease to resist, it is easy to tell what will follow. The prophet that was sent to Bethel did his errand well, withstood Jeroboam's temptation, but in his way home was drawn aside by the old prophet, and at last slain by a lion. Thus many fly from one temptation, but not persevering, are vanquished by another; those that at one time escape his sword, at another time are slain by it. Joash was hopeful when young, but it lasted not long. Yea, many precious servants of God, not making such vigorous resistance in their last days as in their first, have fallen foully; as we see in Solomon, Asa, and others. Indeed it is hard when a line is drawn to a great length, to keep it so straight that it slacken not; and to hold a thing long in our hand, and not have a numbness grow in our fingers, so as to remit of our strength: therefore we are bid so often to hold fast the profession of our faith. But when we see an enemy gaping, to catch us when we fall, methinks this should quicken us the more to it.

Thirdly, Because the promise of life and glory is settled upon the persevering soul, the crown stands at the goal; he hath it that comes to the end of the race. 'To him that overcomes will I give,' not in *prælio*, but in *bello*, not in a particular skirmish, but in the whole war. 'Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the whole will of God, ye might receive the promise,' Heb. x. 36. There is a remarkable accent on that 'henceforth,' which Paul mentions, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8: 'I have fought a good fight; henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' Why, was it not laid up before? Yes, but having persevered and come near the goal, being within sight of home, ready to die, he takes now surer hold of the promise. Indeed in this sense it is, that a gracious soul is nearer its salvation after every victory than it was before, because he approacheth nearer to the end of his race, which is the time promised for the receiving of the promised salvation, Rom. xiii. 10. Then, and not till then, the garland drops upon his head.

Use.—Here we may take up a sad lamentation in respect of the many apostate professors of our days. Never was this spiritual falling-sickness more rife: O how many are sick of it at present, and not a few fallen asleep by it! These times of war and confusion have not made so many broken merchants, as broken professors: where is the congregation that cannot shew some who have outlived their profession? Not unlike the silkworm, which they say, after all her spinning, works herself out of her bottom, and becomes at last a common fly. Are there not many whose forwardness in religion we have stood gazing on with admiration, as the disciples on the temple, ready to say one to another, as they to Christ, See what manner of stones these are! what polished gifts and shining graces are here! and now not one stone left upon another. O did you ever think, that they who went in so goodly array towards heaven, in communion with you, would after that face about, and run over to the devil's side; turn blasphemers, worldlings, and atheists, as some have done?

Oh, what a sad change is here! 'It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them,' 2 Pet. ii. 21. Better never to have walked a step towards heaven, than to put such a scorn and reproach upon the ways of God. Such a one who hath known what a service Satan's is, and what God's is, then to revolt from God to the devil, seems to have compared one with the other; and as the result of his mature thoughts, to pronounce the devil's, which he chooseth, better than God's, which he leaveth. And how is it possible that any can sin upon a higher guilt, and go to hell under a greater load of wrath? These are they which God loathes. He that hates putting away, disdains much more to be himself thus put away. 'If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him,' Heb. x. 31. The apostate is said to tread upon the Son of God, Heb. x. 29, as if he were no better than the dirt under

Digitized by Google

his feet. Well, he shall have treading for treading; God himself will set his foot upon him, Psa. cxix. 118: 'Thou hast trodden down all that err from thy statutes.' And who think you will be weary soonest? He that is under foot bears the weight of the whole man upon him. To be under the foot of God, is to lie under the whole weight of God's wrath. O pity and pray for such forlorn souls; they are objects of the one, and subjects of the other; though they are fallen low, yet not into hell: now and then we see an Eutychus raised, that hath fallen from such a height. 'And you that stand, take heed lest you fall.'

SECTION IV,—*Doct.* 2. Secondly, A soul void of divine armour cannot persevere. What this divine armour is, I have shewn, and the apostle here doth in the several pieces of it. The sanctifying graces of God's Spirit are this armour. One that hath not these wrought in him, will never hold out to pass all the stages of this Christian race, to fight all the battles that are to be fought before victory is to be had. Common gifts of the Spirit, such as illumination, conviction, sudden pangs and flushing heats of affection, may carry out the creature for a while with a goodly appearance of zeal for God, and forwardness in profession; but the strength these afford is soon spent. John's hearers, mentioned John v. 35, got some light and heat by sitting under his burning ministry; but how long did it last? 'Ye were willing to rejoice for a season.' They were very beautiful colours that were drawn on them, but not laid in oil, and therefore soon washed off again. The foolish virgins made as great a blaze with their lamps, and did expect as good a day when Christ should come as the wise virgins; but, alas! their lamps are out before he appeared, and as good never a whit as never the better. The stony ground more forward than the best soil; the seed comes up immediately, as if a crop should soon have been reaped, but a few nipping frosts turn its hue, and the day of the harvest proves a day of desperate sorrow. All these instances and many more in Scripture do evince, that nothing short of solid grace, and a principle of divine life in the soul will persevere. How forward soever formalists and flighty professors are to promise to themselves hopes of reaching heaven, they will find it too long a step for their short-breathed souls to attain. The reasons are,

First, Such want a principle of divine life to draw strength from Christ to preserve them in their course. That by which the gracious soul itself perseveres, is the continual supply it receives from Christ; as the arm and foot is kept alive in the body by those vital spirits which they receive from the heart: 'I live,' saith Paul, 'yet not I, but Christ in me;' that is, I live, but at Christ's cost; he holds, as my soul, so my grace in life. Now the carnal person wanting this union, must needs waste and consume in time; he hath no root to stand on. A carcase, when once it begins to rot, never recovers, but every day grows worse till it runs all into putrefaction; no salve or plaster will do it good; but where there is a principle of life, there, when a member is wounded, nature sends supplies of spirits, and helps to work with the salve for a cure. There is the same difference between a gracious person and an ungracious: see them opposed in this respect, Prov. xiv. 17: 'The righteous man falls seven times a day, and riseth; but the wicked falleth into mischief:' that is, in falling, he falls further, and hath no power to recover himself. When Cain sinned, see how he falls further and further, like a stone down a hill, never stays till he comes to the bottom of despair; from envying his brother to malice, from malice to murder, from murder to impudent lying and brazen-faced boldness to God himself, and from that to despair: so true is that, 2 Tim. ii. 13, 'Evil men shall wax worse and worse.' But now when a saint falls, he riseth; because when he falls he hath a principle of life to cry out to Christ, and such an interest in Christ as stirs him up to help: 'Lord save me,' said Peter, when he began to sink; and presently Christ's hand is put forth; he chides him for his unbelief, but he helps him.

Secondly, An unregenerate soul hath no assurance for the continuance of those common gifts of the Spirit he hath at present: they come on the same terms that temporal enjoyments do to such a one. A carnal person, when he hath his table most sumptuously spread, cannot shew any word of promise under God's hand, that he shall be provided for the next meal. God gives these things to the wicked, as we a crust or night's lodging to a beggar in our barn; it is our bounty; such a one could not sue us for denying the same: so in the

Digitized by Google

common gifts of the Spirit, God was not bound to give them, nor is he to continue them. Thou hast some knowledge of the things of God; thou mayest for all this die without knowledge at last: thou art a sinner in chains; restraining grace keeps thee in; this may be taken off, and thou let loose to thy lusts as freely as ever. And how can he persevere, that in one day may from praying fall to cursing; from a whining, complaining conscience, come to have a seared conscience?

Thirdly, Every unregenerate man, when most busy with profession, hath those engagements lie upon him, that will necessarily, when put to it, take him off one time or other. One is engaged to the world; and when he can come to a good market for that, then he goes away: he cannot have both, and now he will make it appear which he loves best: 'Demas hath forsaken us, and embraced this present world.' Another is a slave to his lust; and when this calls him, he must go, in spite of profession, conscience, God and all. Herod feared John, and did many things; but love is stronger than fear; his love to Herodias overcomes his fear of John, and makes him cut off at once the head of John, and the hopeful buddings which appeared in the tenderness of his conscience and begun reformation. One root of bitterness or other will spring up in such a one. If the complexion of the soul be profane, it will at last come to it, however for a while there may be some religious colour appear in the man's face from some other external cause.

Use.—This shews us what is the root of all final apostacy; and that is, the want of a thorough change of the heart. The apostate doth not lose the grace he had, but discovers he never had any; and it is no wonder to hear that he proves bankrupt, that was worse than nought when he first set up. Many take up their saintship upon trust, and trade in the duties of religion with the credit they have gained from others' opinion of them. They believe themselves to be Christians, because others hope them to be such; and so their great business is, by a zeal in those exercises of religion that lie outmost, to keep up the credit they have abroad, but do not look to get a stock of solid grace within, which should maintain them in their profession; and this proves their undoing at last. Let it therefore make us, in the fear of God, to consider upon what score we take up our profession. Is there that within which bears proportion to our outward zeal? Have we laid a good bottom? Is not the superstructure top-heavy, jetting too far beyond the weak foundation? They say trees shoot as much in the root under ground as in the branches above, and so doth true grace. O remember what was the perishing of the seed in stony ground! it lacked root; and why so, but because it was stony? Be willing the plough should go deep enough to humble thee for sin, and rend thy heart from sin. The soul effectually brought out of the love of sin, as sin, will never be thorough friends with it again. In a word, be serious to find out the great spring that sets all thy wheels on motion in thy religious trade. Do as men that would know how much they are worth, who set what they owe on one side, and what stock they have on the other; and then when they have laid out enough to discharge all debts and engagements, what remains to themselves they may call their own. Thus do thou consider what thou standest engaged to, thy worldly credit, profit, slavish fear of God, and selfish desire of happiness; and when thou hast allowed for all these, see then what remains of thy fear of God, love to God, &c. If nothing, thou art naught; if any, the less there be the weaker Christian thou art; and when thou comest to be tried in God's fire, thou wilt suffer loss of all the other, which as hay and stubble will be burnt up.

Section V.—*Doct.* 3. Every soul clad with this armour of God shall stand and persevere; or thus, true grace can never be vanquished. The Christian is born a conqueror, the gates of hell shall not prevail against him. 'He that is born of God overcometh the world,' 1 John v. 4. Mark from whence the victory is dated, even from his birth: there is victory sown in his new nature, even that seed of God, which will keep him from being swallowed up by sin or Satan. As Christ rose, never to die more, so doth he raise souls from the grave of sin, never to come under the power of spiritual death more. 'These holy ones of God cannot see corruption.' Hence he that believes is said in the present tense to have eternal life. As the law that came four hundred years after could not make void the promise to Abraham, so nothing that intervenes

Digitized by Google

can hinder the accomplishing of that promise of eternal life which was given and passed to Christ in their behalf before the foundation of the world. If a saint could any way miscarry and fall short of this eternal life, it must be from one of these three causes: 1. Because God may forsake the Christian, and withdraw his grace and help from him; or, 2. Because the believer may forsake God; or, lastly, Because Satan may pluck him out of the hands of God. A fourth I know not. Now none of these can be.

First, God can never forsake the Christian. Some unadvised speeches have dropped from tempted souls, discovering some fears of God's casting them off; but they have been confuted, and have eaten their words with shame, as we see in Job and David. O what admirable security hath the great God given his children in this particular!

First, In promises. 'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee, Heb. xiii. 5. Five negatives in that promise, as so many seals to ratify it to our faith: he assures us there never did or can so much as arise a repenting thought in his heart concerning the purposes of his love and special grace towards his children. Rom. xi. 29: 'The gifts and calling of God are without repentance:' even the believers' sin against him, their froward carriage, stirs not up thoughts of casting off, but of reducing them: 'For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him; I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart; I have seen his ways, and will heal him,' Isa. lvii. 17, 18. The water of the saints' failings, cast on the fire of God's love, cannot quench it; 'Whom he loves, he loves to the end.'

Secondly, God, to give further weight and credit to our unbelieving and misgiving hearts, seals his promise with an oath; see Isa. liv. 9, 10: 'With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. This is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should not return over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee.' Yea, he goes on and tells them, 'The mountains shall depart,' (meaning at the end of the world, when the whole frame of the heavens and earth shall be dissolved,) 'but my kindness shall not depart, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed.' Now, lest any should think this was some charter belonging to the Jews alone, we find it, ver. 17, settled on every servant of God as his portion: 'This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.' And surely God that is so careful to make his children's inheritance sure to them, will give them little thanks who busy their wits to invalid and weaken his conveyances, yea, disprove his will: if they had taken a bribe, they could not plead Satan's cause better.

Thirdly, In the actual fulfilling these promises (which he hath made to believers) to Christ their representative. As God, before the world began, gave a promise of eternal life to Christ for them, so now hath he given actual possession of that glorious place to Christ as their advocate, where that eternal life shall be enjoyed by them; for as he came upon our errand from heaven, so thither he returned again to take and hold possession of that inheritance which God had of old promised, and he in one sum at his death had paid for. And now what ground of fear can there be in the believer's heart concerning God's love standing firm to him, when he sees the whole covenant performed already to Christ for him, whom God hath not only called to, sanctified for, and upheld in, the great work he was to finish for us, but also justified in his resurrection and gaol delivery, and received him into heaven, there to sit on the right hand of the Majesty on high, by which he hath not only possession for us, but full power to give to all believers?

A second occasion of fear to the believer that he shall not persevere, may be taken from himself. He has many sad fears and tremblings of heart that he shall at last forsake God: the journey to heaven is long, and his grace weak. Oh, saith he, is it not possible that this little grace should fail, and I fall short at last of glory? Now here there is such provision made in the covenant as scatters this cloud also.

First, The Spirit of God is given on purpose to prevent this. Christ left his mother with John, but his saints with his Spirit, to tutor and keep them, that they should not lose themselves in their journey to heaven. O, how sweet is that place, Ezek. xxxvi. 27: 'I will put my Spirit in you, and cause you to

Digitized by Google

walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them!' He doth not say, they shall have his Spirit, if they will walk in his statutes; no, his Spirit shall cause them to do it. But maybe thou art afraid thou mayest grieve him, and so he in anger leave thee, and thou perish for want of his help and counsel. *Answ.* The Spirit of God is indeed sensible of unkindness, and upon a saint's sin may withdraw in regard of present assistance, but never in regard of his care; as a mother may let her froward child go alone, till it get a knock, that may make it cry to be taken up again into her arms, but still her eyes are on it that it shall not fall into mischief. The Spirit withdrew from Samson, and he fell into the Philistine's hands; and this makes him cry to God, and the Spirit puts forth his strength in him again. Thus, here, indeed, the office of the Spirit is to abide for ever with the saints, John xiv. 16: "He shall send you another Comforter, that he may abide for ever with you.'

Secondly, It is one main business of Christ's intercession, to obtain of God perseverance for our weak graces. 'I have prayed,' saith Christ to Peter, 'that thy faith fail not.' But was that not a particular privilege granted to him, which may be denied to another? O sirs, do we think that Christ's love looks asquint? Doth he pray for one child more than another? Such fears and jealousies foolish children are ready to take up; and therefore Christ prevents them, by bidding Peter, in the very next words, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren,' Luke xxii. 32; that is, when thou feelest the efficacy and force of my prayer for thy faith, carry this good news to them, that their hearts may be strenghthened also; and what strengthening had it been to them, if Christ prayed not for them as well as Peter? Does Christ pray for us? yea, doth he not live to pray for us? O, how can children of so many prayers, of such prayers, perish? The saints' prayers have a mighty power. Jacob wrestled and had power with God; this was his sword and bow (to allude to what he said of the parcel of ground he took from the Amorite) by which he got the victory and had power with God. This was the key with which Elijah opened and shut heaven. And if the weak prayers of saints, coming in his name, have such credit in heaven, that with them they can go to God's treasure, and carry away as much as their arm of faith can hold; O then, what prevalency has Christ's intercession, who is a Son, an obedient Son, that is come from finishing his great work on earth, and now prays his Father for nothing but what he hath bid him ask, yea, for nothing but what he is beforehand with him for; and all this to a Father that loves those he prays for as well as himself! Bid Satan avaunt. Say not thy weak faith shall perish, till thou hearest that Christ hath left praying, or meets with a repulse.

Thirdly, Let us see whether Satan be able to pluck the Christian away, and step betwixt him and home. I have had occasion to speak of this subject in another place, the less here shall serve. Abundant provision is made against his assaults. The saint is wrapped up in the everlasting arms of Almighty power; and what can a cursed devil do against God, who laid those chains on him which he cannot shake off? When he is able to pluck that dart of divine fury out of his own conscience which God hath fastened there, then let him think of such an enterprise as this. How can he overcome thee, that cannot tempt thee but in God's appointed time? And if God set Satan his time to assault the Christian whom he loves so dearly, surely it shall be when he shall be repulsed with greatest shame.

Use 1.—Away then with that doctrine which saith, One may be a saint to-day, and none to-morrow; now a Peter, anon a Judas: O what unsavory stuff is this! it is a principle that at once crosseth the main design of God in the gospel-covenant, reflects sadly on the honour of Christ, and wounds the saints' comfort to the heart.

First, it is derogatory to God's design in the gospel-covenant, which we find to be this, that his children might be put into a state sure and safe from miscarrying at last, which by the first covenant man was not. See Rom. iv. 16; 'Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.' God on purpose, because of the weakness of the first covenant, through the mutable nature of man, makes a new covenant of a far different constitution and frame, not of works, as that was, but of faith; and why? The apostle tells us, that it might be sure to 'all the seed,' that not one

Digitized by Google

soul, who by faith should be adopted into Abraham's family, and so become a child of the promise, should fail of inheriting the blessing of the promise, which is eternal life: called so, Tit. i. 2; and all this because the promise is founded upon grace, that is, God's immutable good pleasure in Christ, and not upon the variable and inconstant obedience of man, as the first covenant was. But if a saint may finally fall, then is the promise no more sure in this covenant than it was in that, and so God should not have the end he propounds.

Secondly, It reflects sadly on Christ's honour, both as he is intrusted with the saints' salvation, and also as he is interested in it. First, as he is intrusted with the saints' salvation. He tells us they are given him of his Father for this very end, that he should give them eternal life; yea, that power which he hath over all flesh was given him, to render him every way able to affect this one business, John xvii. 2. He accepts the charge, owns them as his sheep, knows them every one, and promiseth, 'he will give them eternal life; they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand,' John x. 27, 28. Now how well do they consult with Christ's honour, that say his sheep may die in a ditch of final apostasy, notwithstanding all this! Secondly, As he is interested in the salvation of every saint. The life of his own glory is bound up in the eternal life of his saints. It is true, when Adam fell, God did save his stake; but how can Christ, who is so nearly united to every believing soul? There was a league of friendship betwixt God and Adam; but no such union as here, where Christ and his saints make but one Christ, for which his church is called Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 12: 'As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so is Christ.' Christ and his members make one Christ; now is it possible a part of Christ can be found at last burning in hell? Can Christ be a cripple Christ? Can this member drop off, and that? It is as possible that all as that any should; and how can Christ part with his mystical members, and not with his glory; Doth not every member add an ornament to the body, yea, an honour? The church is called, 'The fullness of him,' Eph. i. 23. O how dishonourable is it to Christ, that we should think he should want any of his fullness! and how can the man be full and complete that wants a member?

Thirdly, It wounds the saints' comfort to the heart, and lays their joy a bleeding. Paul saith he did not, 2 Cor. ii. 17; he did not dash the generous wine of God's word with the water of man's conceits: no, he gave them pure gospel. Truly this principle of saints' falling from grace gives a sad dash to the sweet wine of the promises; the soul-reviving comfort that sparkles in them ariseth from the sure conveyance with which they are in Christ made over to the believers to have and to hold for ever: hence called 'the sure mercies of David,' Acts xiii. 34; mercies that shall never fail. This, this indeed is wine that makes glad the heart of a saint; though he may be whipped in the house when he sins, yet he shall not be turned out of doors. As God promised in the type to David's seed, Psalm lxxxix. 33; 'Nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail;' and, ver. 36, 'His seed shall endure for ever.' Could anything separate the believer from the love of God in Christ, this would be as a hole at the bottom of his cup, to leak out all his joy; he might then fear every temptation or affliction he meets would slay him, and so the wicked's curse would be the saint's portion. His life would ever hang in doubt before him, and the fearful expectation of his final miscarriage, which he sees may befall him, would eat up the joy of his present hope. Now how contrary such a frame of heart is to the spirit of adoption, and full assurance of hope, which the grace of the new covenant gives, he that runs may read in the word.

Use 2.—This truth prepares a sovereign cordial to restore the fainting spirits of weak believers, who are surprised with many fears concerning their persevering, and holding out to the end of their warfare. Be of good cheer, poor soul; God hath given Christ the life of every soul within the ark of his covenant. Your eternal safety is provided for; 'Whom he loves, he loves to the end,' John xiii. 1. Hath he made thee willing in the day of his power to march under his banner, and espouse his quarrel against sin and hell? The same power that overcame thy rebellious heart to himself, will overcome all thy enemies within and without for thee. Say not, thou art a bruised reed; with

Digitized by Google

this he will break Satan's head, and not cease till he hath brought forth judgment unto complete victory in thy soul. He that can make a few wounded men rise up and take a strong city, can make a wounded spirit triumph over sin and devils, Jer. xxxvii. 10. The ark stood in the midst of Jordan till the whole camp of Israel was safely got over into Canaan, Josh. iii. And so doth the covenant, which the ark did but typify; yea, Christ, covenant, and all, stand to secure the saints a safe passage to heaven. If but one believer drowns, the covenant must drown with him. Christ and the saints are put together as co-heirs of the same inheritance, Rom. viii. 17. 'If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' We cannot dispute against one but we question the firmness of the other's title. When you hear Christ is turned out of heaven, or himself to be willing to sell his inheritance there, then, poor Christian, fear thy coming thither, and not till then. Co-heirs cannot sell the inheritance except both give up their right, which Christ will never do, nor suffer thee.

Use 3.—Thirdly, This truth calls for a word or two of caution. Though there is no fear of a saint's falling from grace, yet there is great danger of others falling from the top of this comfortable doctrine, into a careless security, and presumptuous boldness; and therefore a battlement is very necessary, that from it we may with safety to our souls stand and view the pleasant prospect this truth presents to our eye. That flower from which the bee sucks honey, the spider draws poison. That which is a restorative to the saint's grace, proves an incentive to the lust of a wicked man. What Paul said of the law, we may truly say of the gospel: sin taking occasion from the grace of the gospel, and the sweet promises thereof, deceives the carnal heart, and works in him all manner of wickedness. Indeed, sin seldom grows so rank anywhere, as in those who water its roots with the grace of the gospel. Two ways this doctrine may be abused.

First, Into a neglect of duty.

Secondly, Into a liberty to sin. Take heed of both.

First, Beware of falling into a neglect of duty upon this score; if a Christian, thou canst not fall away from grace. Take for an antidote against this, three particulars.

First, There are other arguments to invite, yea, that will constrain thee to a constant vigorous performing of duty, though the fear of falling away should not come in, or else thou art not a Christian. What! nothing make the child diligent about his father's business, but fear of being disinherited and turned out of doors! There is sure some better motive to duty in a saint's heart, or else religion is a melancholy work. Speak for yourselves, O ye saints, is self-preservation all you pray for, and hear for? Should a messenger come from heaven, and tell you heaven were yours, would this make you give over your, spiritual trade, and not care whether you had any more acquaintance with God till you came thither? O how harsh doth this sound in your ears! There are such principles engraven in the Christian's bosom, that will not suffer a strangeness long to grow betwixt God and him. He is under the law of a new life, which carries him naturally to desire communion with God, as the child doth to see the face of his dear father; and every duty is a mount wherein God presents himself to be seen and enjoyed by every Christian.

Secondly, To neglect duty upon such a persuasion, is contrary to Christ's practice and counsel. First, His practice. Though Christ never doubted of his Father's love, nor questioned the happy issue of all his temptations, agonies, and sufferings; yet he prays, and prays again more earnestly, Luke xxii. 44. Secondly, His counsel and command. He told Peter, that Satan had begged leave to have him, to sift him. But withal he comforts him, who was to be hardest put to it, with this, 'But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' Sure our Saviour, by this provision made for him and the rest, means to save them a labour that they need not watch or pray. No such matter; after this, as you may see, verse 40, he calls them up to duty: 'Pray, that ye enter not into temptation.' Christ's praying for them was to strengthen their faith, when they should themselves pray for the same mercy; not to nourish their sloth, that they needed not to pray. Christ's prayers in heaven for his saints are all heard already, but the return of them is reserved to be inclosed in the answer

Digitized by Google

God sends to their own prayers: the Christian cannot in faith expect to the mercies Christ prays for in heaven, so long as he lives in the neglec duty on earth. They stand ready against he calls for them by the pr faith; and if they be not worth sending this messenger to heaven, truly t worth little.

Thirdly, Consider, that although the Christian be secured from a to final apostasy, yet he may fall sadly, to the bruising of his conscience, cri his grace, and reproach of the gospel; which sure are enough to k Christian upon his watch, and the more, because ordinarily the saints slidings begin in their duties. As it is with tradesmen in the world, th grow careless of their business, often out of their shop, and then they go hand in their estate: so here, first remiss in a duty, and then fall into a of their graces and comforts, yea, sometimes into those ways that ar dalous. A stuff loseth its gloss before it wears: the Christian, the lustr grace, in the lively exercise of duty, and then the strength of it.

Secondly, Take heed of abusing this doctrine unto a liberty to sin. S sin because grace abounds; grow loose because we have God fast boun promise? God forbid: none but a devil would teach us this logic. I great height of sin those wretched Jews came to, who could quaff and it while death looked in upon them at the windows: 'Let us eat and dri to-morrow we shall die.' They discovered their atheism therein. But prodigious stature in sin must that man be grown to, that can sin un protection of the promise, and draw his encouragement to sin from th lasting love of God! Let us eat and drink, for we are sure to live saved. Grace cannot dwell in that heart which draws such a cursed con from the promises of God's grace; the saints have not so learned Christ inference the apostle makes from the sweet privileges we enjoy in the co of grace, is not to wallow in sin; but having these promises, to cleanse ou from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, 2 Cor. vii. 1. It is the nature of fai grace that trades with promises, to purify the heart. Now the more report faith brings of God's love from the promise of the soul, the purifies the heart, because love, by which faith works, is thereby more in to God; and if once this affection takes fire, the room becomes too hot to stay there.

Section VI.—The fourth note and last is, That it will abundantly recon all the hardship and trouble the Christian endures in this war against s Satan, that he shall be able, when the war is ended, to stand. In man's wars not get by them that fight in them; the gains of these are commonly put few pockets. The common soldiers endure most of the hardship, but go awa little of the profit; they fight to make a few that are great yet greater, a many times themselves turned off at last, with what will hardly pay for th of their wounds, or keep them from starving in a poor hospital. But in th there is none loseth, but he that runs away. A glorious reward there is for faithful soldier in Christ's camp: and that is wrapped up in this phrase, 'H done all, to stand.' Now in this place, 'to stand,' imports three things, laid together will clear the point.

First, 'To stand,' in this place, is to stand conquerors. An army, conquered, is said to fall before their enemy, and the conqueror to Lev. xxvi.; Dan. xi. 25. Every Christian shall, at the end of the war, st conqueror over his vanquished lusts, and Satan that headed them. M sweet victory the Christian hath here over Satan: but, alas! the joy of conquests is again interrupted with fresh alarms from his rallied enemy. day he hath the better, and may be the next he puts us to the hazard of an battle; much ado he hath to keep what he hath got; yea, his victories are as send him bleeding out of the field. Though he repulses the temptati last, yet the wounds his conscience gets in the fight do overcast the gl the victory. It is seldom the Christian comes off without some sad com of the treachery of his own heart, which had like to have lost the day betrayed him into the enemies' hand. But for thy eternal comfort, know, Christian, there is a blessed day coming, which shall make a full and final sion of the quarrel betwixt thee and Satan; thou shalt see this enemy's quite broke up: not a weapon left in his hand to lift up against thee.

Digitized by Google

shalt tread upon his high places, from which he hath made so many shots at thee. Thou shalt see them all dismantled and demolished, till there be not left standing any one corruption in thy bosom for a devil to hide and harbour himself in. Satan, at whose approach thou hast so trembled, shall then be subdued under thy feet. He that hath so oft bid thee bow down, that he might go over thy soul, and trample upon all thy glory, shall now have his neck laid to be trodden on by thee. Were there nothing else to be expected as the fruits of our watching and praying, weeping and mourning, severe duties of mortification and self-denial, with whatever else our Christian warfare puts us upon, but this, our labour would not be in vain in the Lord. Yea, blessed watching and praying, happy tears and wounds, we meet with in this war; may they but at last end in a full and eternal victory over sin and Satan. Bondage is one of the worst of evils. The baser an enemy is, the more abhorred by noble spirits. Saul feared to fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, and to be abused by their scorn and reproach, more than a bloody death. Who baser than Satan? What viler tyrant than sin? Glorious then will the day be, wherein we shall praise God for delivering us out of the hands of all our sins, and from the hand of Satan. But dismal to you, sinners, who at the same time, wherein you shall see the saints stand with crowns of victory on their heads, must yourselves, like fettered captives, be dragged to hell's dungeon, there to have your ear bored unto an eternal bondage under your lusts. And what more miserable sentence can God himself pass upon you? Here sin is pleasure, there it will be torment. Here you have suitable provision to entertain your lusts withal; palaces for pride to dwell and strut herself in; delicious fare for your wanton palates; houses and lands, with coffers of silver and gold for your covetous hearts, by their self-pleasing thoughts, to sit brooding upon. But you will find none of these there; hell is a barren place, nothing grows in that land of darkness to solace and recreate the sinners' minds. You shall have your lusts, but want the food you long for. O what a torment must that needs be, to have a soul sharp set, even to a ravenous hunger after sin, but chained up where it can come at nothing it would have to satisfy its lusts! For a proud wretch, that could wish he might domineer over all the world, yea, over God himself, if he would let him, to be kept down in such a dungeon as hell! O how it will cut, for the malicious sinner, whose heart swells with rancour against God and his saints, that he could pluck them out of God's bosom, yea, God out of his throne, if he had power, to find his hands so manacled, that he can do nothing against them he so hates! O how this will torment! Speak, O you saints, whose partial victory over sin at present is so sweet to you, that you would choose a thousand deaths, sooner than return to your old bondage under your lusts; how glorious then is that day in your eye, when this shall be completed in a full and eternal conquest, never to have anything to do more with sin or Satan!

Secondly, 'To stand,' is here to stand justified and acquitted at the great day of judgment. The phrase is frequent in Scripture, which sets out the solemn discharge they shall have then by standing in judgment: Psa. i. 5, 'The wicked shall not stand in the judgment;' that is, they shall not be justified; Psa. cxxx. 3, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?' that is, who shall be discharged? The great God, upon whose errand we come into the world, hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world by Jesus Christ: a solemn day it will be, when all that ever lived on earth, high and low, good and bad, shall meet in one assembly to make their personal appearance before Christ, and from his mouth to receive their eternal doom, who shall, in his majestic robes of glory, ascend the awful seat of judicature, attended with his illustrious train and guard of angels about him, as so many officers ready to execute and perform his pleasure, according to the definitive sentence that he shall pronounce, either to conduct those blessed ones whom he shall justify into his glorious kingdom, or bind them hand and foot to be cast into hell's unquenchable flames, whom he shall condemn. I do not wonder that Paul's sermon on this subject did make an earthquake in Felix's conscience; but rather that any should be so far gone in a spiritual lethargy and numbness of conscience, that the thought of this day cannot recover them to their sense and feeling. O, sirs, do you not vote them happy men and women that shall speed

Digitized by Google

well on this day? Are not your thoughts inquiring who those blessed souls are which shall be acquitted by the lively voice of Christ the Judge? You need not ascend to search the rolls of election in heaven: here you may know they are such as fight the Lord's battles on earth against Satan, in the Lord's armour, and that to the end of their lives. These having done all, shall stand in judgment. And were it but at a man's bar, some court-martial, where a soldier stood upon trial for his life, either to be condemned as a traitor to his prince, or cleared as faithful in his trust, O how such a one would listen, to hear how it would go with him, and be overjoyed when the judge pronounces him innocent! Well may such be bid to fall down on their knees, thank God and the judge that have saved their lives; how much more ravishing will the sweet voice of Christ be, in the saints' ears, when he shall, in the face of men and angels, make public declaration of their righteousness! O how confounded will Satan then be, who was their accuser to God, and their consciences also, ever threatening them with the terror of that day! How blank will the wicked world be, to see the dirt that they had thrown by their calumnies and lying reports on the saints' faces wiped off with Christ's own hand; those from Christ's mouth to be justified as sincere whom they had called hypocrites! Will not this, O ye saints, be enough for all the scorn you were laden with from the world, and the conflict you endured with the prince of the world? But this is not all. Therefore,

Thirdly, 'To stand,' doth here also, as the complement of their reward, denote the saints' standing in heaven's glory. Princes, when they would reward any of their subjects, that in their wars have done eminent service to the crown, as the utmost they can do for them, do prefer them to court, there to enjoy their princely favour, and stand in some place of honourable service before them continually. Solomon sets it out as the greatest reward of faithful subjects 'to stand before kings.' Heaven is the royal city, where the great God keeps his court. The happiness of glorious angels is to stand there before God. 'I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God,' Luke i. 19; that is, I am one of those heavenly spirits who wait on the great God, and stand before his face, as courtiers do about their prince. Now, such honour shall every faithful soul have. 'Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by,' Zech. iii. 7. He alludes to the temple, which had rooms joining to it, for the priests that waited on the Lord in his holy service there; or to courtiers, that have stately galleries and lodgings becoming their place at court, allowed them in the king's palace they wait upon. Thus all the saints, whose representative Joshua was, shall, after they have kept the Lord's charge, in a short life's service on earth, be called up to stand before God in heaven, where with angels they shall have their galleries and mansions of glory also. O, happy they, who shall stand before the Lord in glory! The greatest peers of a realm, such as earls, marquises, and dukes, count it greater honour to stand before their king, though bare-headed, and oft upon the knee, than to live in the country, where all bow and stand bare to them; yea, let but their prince forbid them coming to court, and it is not their great estates, or respect they have where they live, will content them. It is better to wait in heaven than to reign on earth. It is sweet standing before the Lord here in an ordinance. One day in the worship of God is better than many elsewhere; O, what then is it to stand before God in glory! If the saint's spikenard sendeth forth so sweet a smell, while the king sits at his table here, in a sermon or sacrament, Cant. i. 12, O then, what joy must needs flow from their near attendance on him, as he sits at his table in heaven, which when God first made, it was intended by him to be that chamber of presence in which he would present himself to be seen and enjoyed by his saints in all his glory! I know nothing would have a more powerful, yea, universal operation upon a saint's spirit, than the frequent and spiritual consideration of that blissful state in heaven, which will at last crown all their sad conflicts here on earth. None like this sword to cut the very sinews of temptation, and behead those lusts which defy and outbrave whole troops of other arguments. It is almost unpossible to sin with lively thoughts and hopes of that glory. It is when the thoughts of heaven are long out of the Christian's sight, and he knows not what is become of his hopes of that glorious place, that he begins to set up

Digitized by Google

some Idol, as Israel the calf in Moses' absence, which he may dance before. But let heaven come in sight, and the Christian's heart will be well warmed with the thoughts of it, and you may as soon persuade a king to throw his royal diadem into a sink, and wallow with his robes in a kennel, as a saint to sin with expectation of heaven's glory. Sin is the devil's work, not a saint's, who is a peer in heaven, and waits every hour for the writ that shall call him to stand, with angels and glorified saints, before the throne of God. This would cheer the Christian's heart, and confirm him when the fight is hottest, and the bullets fly thickest from men and devils, to think it is heaven all this is for, where it is worth having a place, though we go through fire and water to it. 'It is before the Lord,' saith David to scoffing Michael, 'that chose me before thy father, and all his house; therefore I will play before the Lord, and I will yet be more vile than thus,' 2 Sam. vi. 21. Thus, Christian, wouldst thou throw off the vipers of reproaches, which from the fire of the wicked's malice fly upon thee? It is for God that I pray, hear, mortify my lust, deny myself of my carnal sports, profits, and pleasures, that God who hath passed by kings and princes, to choose me, a poor wretch, to stand before him in glory; therefore I will be yet more vile than thus. O sirs, were there not another world to enjoy God in, yet should we not, while we have our being, serve our Maker? The heavens and the earth obey his law, that are capable of no reward for doing his will. 'Quench hell, burn heaven,' said a holy man, 'yet I will love and fear my God.' How much more, when the everlasting arms of mercy stand ready stretched to carry you, as soon as the fight is over, into the blissful presence of God! You have servants of your own so ingenious and observant, that can follow your work hard abroad in all weathers; and may they but, when they come home, weary and hungry at night, obtain a kind look from you, and some tender care over them, they are very thankful. 'Yea, saith one, to shame the sluggish Christian, 'how many hundred miles will the poor spaniel run after his master in a journey, although he gets nothing but a few crumbs, or a bone from his master's trencher?' In a word, which is more, the devil's slaves, what will they not do and venture at his command, who hath not so much to give them as you to your dog; not a crust, not a drop of water to cool their tongue! And shall not the joy of heaven which is set before the Christian, into which he shall assuredly enter, make him run his race, endure a short scuffle of temptation and affliction? Yea, sure, and make him reckon also, that 'these are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in him.'

Ephes. vi. 14.

Stand therefore.

The apostle had laid down in general, ver. 13, what armour the Christian soldier must use; 'armour of God.' Now, lest any should stamp divinity upon what is human, and make bold to set God's name on their counterfeit ware, calling that armour of God which comes out of their private forge, (as Papists and many carnal Protestants also do, who invent weapons to fight the devil with that never came into God's heart to appoint,) he therefore comes more particularly to shew what this whole armour of God is, describing it piece by piece, which together make up the complete suit, and every way furnish the Christian to take the field against this his enemy. We shall handle them in that order we find them here laid by the apostle. Only something would briefly be first said to the posture given us in charge, as that which we are to observe in the use of every piece, and therefore prefixed to all, because it hath influence into all. The posture lies in these words, 'Stand therefore:' this word 'stand' is the same with the last in the preceding verse; but neither in the same mood nor tense; there, put for victory and triumph when the war is done; here, for the Christian's posture in the fight, and in order to it. It is a military expression, a word of command that captains use upon different occasions to their soldiers, and so imports several duties that are required at the Christian's hands.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN IS BRIEFLY SHEWED THE NECESSITY OF RESISTING SATAN'S TEMPTATIONS, WITH THE DANGER OF YIELDING TO THEM.

FIRST, To stand is opposed to a cowardly flight from, or treacherous yielding t the enemy. When a captain sees his men begin to shrink, and perceives son disposition in them to fly or yield, then he bids stand, that is, stand manfully it, and make good your ground against the enemy, by a valiant receiving h charge, and repelling his force. The word, taken thus, points at a suitable du incumbent on the Christian, which take in this note.

Note.—Satan in his temptations is stoutly to be resisted, not in any wi yielded unto.

Reas. 1.—The command is express for it, 1 Pet. v. 9: 'Whom resist stedfa in the faith.' Set yourself in battle against him, as the word imports; fight hi whenever he comes. Soldiers must keep close to their commission, whatev comes on it. When Joab sent Uriah to stand in the fore front of the battle, the face of death itself, he could not but see his danger, yet he disputes not t matter with his general; obey he must, though he looses his life upon the pla Cowardice and disobedience to the leader's command are counted, among t Turks, the most damning sins; and shall they be thought peccadiloes, little on by us, that have Christ for our Captain to serve, and sin and the devil for en mies to fight? To resist some temptations may cost us dear. 'Ye have not y resisted unto blood,' saith the apostle, 'striving against sin,' Heb. xii. 4, imp ing it may come to that; and if it should, it alters not the case, nor gives a d pensation to shift for ourselves, by choosing to sin, rather than to suffer. T Roman captain said it was necessary to sail, not to live; and shall a Christian afraid of his duty, when it is attended without hazard? The soldier carries prince's honour into the field with him, and so doth the Christian his Go whenever he is called to contest with any temptation. Now it will be seen what rate he values his honour. David's subjects valued him worth ten thous of their lives, and therefore would die every man of them rather than hazard h O how unworthy is it, then, to expose the name of God to reproach rather th ourselves to a little scorn, temporal loss, or trouble! It was Pompey's bo that at a word or nod of his he could make his soldiers creep up the steepest r on their hands and knees, though they were knocked down as fast as they w up. Truly, God is not prodigal of the blood of his servants; yet sometimes tries their loyalty in hard services and sharp temptations, that he may, from th faithfulness to him, and holy stoutness in their sufferings for him, triumph o Satan, who was so impudent as to tell God that one of his choicest servants but serve himself in serving of him: 'Doth Job fear God for nought?' As when any sharp encounter came, he would turn head, and rather curse God t submit to him; and therefore we find the Lord glorying over Satan, Job. ii 'Still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movest me against him;' a the Lord had said, What dost think now, Satan? Hath not Job proved the loud liar? I have some servants, thou seest, that will serve me without a br that will hold fast their integrity when they can hold fast nothing else. T hast got away his estate, servants, and children, and yet he stands his grou and thou hast not got thy will of him, nor his integrity from him.

2. God furnisheth us with armour for this end, that we should stand it valiantly, and not yield to Satan tempting. To deliver up a castle int enemy's hand, when it is well provided with ammunition to defend it, is sha ful, and unworthy of such a trust. This makes the Christian's sin more honourable than another's, because he is better appointed to make resista Take a graceless soul, when solicited (suppose) to a sin that promiseth ca pleasure or profit, it is no great wonder that he yields at first summons, delivers up himself prisoner to Satan. The poor wretch, alas! hath no arm on to repel the motion. He tastes no sweetness in Christ; what marvel if his hungry soul, for want of better food, falls on board upon the de cheer? that he who hath no hope of another world be made to shark prowl to get some of this? The goat, we say, must browse where she is

Digitized by Google

and the sinner feed on earth and earthly things, to which he is staked down by his carnal heart; but the Christian hath a hope in his bosom of possessing greater glory than this peddling world can pretend to; yea, a faith that is able to entertain him at present with some of heaven's joys, it being the nature of that grace to give existence to the good things of the promise. This helmet on, and shield lifted up, would keep off a whole shower of such arrows from hurting a Christian. God hath reason to take it the worse at his hands to yield, that might have stood, would he but have made use of those graces which God had given him for his defence, or called in help from heaven. 'Hast thou eaten,' saith God to Adam, 'of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?' Gen. iii. 11. The accent lies in *thou*. It was not sure for hunger; thou hadst a whole paradise before thee: hast thou eaten, that wert provided so well to have withstood him? Hast thou, may God say to the Christian, eaten of the devil's dainties, who hast a key to go to my cupboard? Does thy heavenly Father keep so starved a house that the devil's scraps will go down with thee?

3. The Christian's safety lies in resisting. All the armour here provided is to defend the Christian fighting, none to secure him flying; stand, and the day is ours; fly or yield, and all is lost. Great captains to make their soldiers more resolute, do sometimes cut off all hope of a safe retreat to them that run away: thus the Norman conqueror, as soon as his men were set on English shore, sent away his ships in their sight, that they might resolve to fight or die. God takes away all thought of safety to the coward. Not a piece to be found for the back in all God's armoury. Stand, and the bullets light all on your armour; fly, and they enter into your hearts. It is a terrible place, Heb. x. 38: 'The just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.' He that stands to it believingly, comes off with his life; but he that recoils, and runs from his colours, as the word *uposteiletai* imports, God will have no pleasure in him, except it be in the just execution of his wrath on him. And doth he not make a sad change, that, from fighting against Satan, engageth God as an enemy against him? There is comfort in striving against sin and Satan, though to blood; but none to lie sweating under the fiery indignation of a revenging God. What Satan lays on, God can take off; but who can ease, if God lays on? What man would not rather die in the field fighting for his prince, than on a scaffold by the axe for cowardice or treachery?

4. The enemy we have to do withal is such as is only to be dealt with by resisting. God is an enemy that is overcome by yielding; the devil only by force of arms.

First, He is a cowardly enemy; though he sets a bold face on it in tempting, he carries a fearful heart in his breast. The work is naught he goes about; and as a thief is afraid of every light he sees, or noise he hears, in the house he would rob, so Satan is discouraged where he finds the soul waking, and in a posture to oppose him. He fears the Christian more than thou needest him. 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know,' said the devil, Acts xix. 15. That is, I know them to my shame; they have both put me to flight, and if ye were such as they, I should fear you also. Believe it, soul, he trembles at thy faith; put it forth in prayer to call for help to heaven against him, and exert it vigorously by rejecting the motions he makes, and thou shalt see him run. Did soldiers in a castle know that their enemies besieging them were in a distracted condition, and would certainly, upon their sallying out, break up and fly away, what metal and courage would this fill them withal? The Spirit of God (who knows well enough how affairs stand in the devil's camp) sends this intelligence unto every soul that is beset by his temptations, Jam. iv. 8, 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.' He cannot hurt us without our leave. The devil is not so good a drawer, but when he finds it comes not, the soul yields not, his heart then fails him, at least for the present; as in Christ's combat, it is said, 'he departed from him for a season.' When the devil continues long the same suit, it is to be feared that person, though he hath not fully promised him, yet he hath not given him a peremptory denial. He is a suitor that listens for something to drop from the creature that may encourage him to prosecute his motion; no way to be rid of him, but to shut the door

Digitized by Google

upon him, and deny all discourse with him; which prompts to the second character.

2. He is an encroaching enemy, and therefore to be resisted. 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,' saith the apostle, 'neither give place to the devil,' Eph. iv. 26, as soldiers, by cowardly leaving some outwork they are set to defend, give place to their enemy, who enters the same, and from thence doth more easily shoot into the city than he could before. Thus, yielding in one temptation, we let the devil into our trench, and give him a fair advantage to do us the more mischief. The angry man, while he is raging and raving, thinks, perhaps, no more but to ease his passion by disgorging it in some bitter keen words; but, alas, while his fury and wrath is sallying out at the portal of his lips, the devil, finding the door open, enters, and hurries him further than he dreamed of. We have not to do with an Hanibal, who, though a great swordsman, yet wanted the art of following and improving the advantages his victories gave him; but with a cunning devil, that will easily lose no ground he gets. Our best way, therefore, is to give him no hand-hold, not so much as to come near the door where sin dwells, lest we be hooked in. If we mean not to be burnt, let us not walk upon the coals of temptation; if not to be tanned, let us not stand where the sun lies. They sure forget what an insinuating, wriggling nature this serpent hath that dare yield to him in something, and make us believe they will not in another; who will sit in the company of drunkards, frequent the places where the sin is committed, and yet pretend they mean not to be such; that will prostitute their eyes to unchaste objects, and yet be chaste; that will lend their ears to any corrupt doctrine of the times, and yet be sound in the faith. This is a strong delusion that such were under. If a man hath not power enough to resist Satan in the less, what reason hath he to think he shall in the greater? Thou hast not grace, it seems, to keep thee from throwing thyself into the whirl of temptation, and dost thou think, when in it, thou shalt bear up against the stream of it? One would think it is easier when in the ship to keep from falling overboard, than when in the sea to get safely into the ship again.

3. He is an accusing enemy; and of a truth folly is in that man's name who knows what a tell-tale the devil is, and yet will, by yielding to his temptation, put an errand into his mouth, with which he may accuse him to God. Some foolishly report that witches cannot hurt till they receive an alms; but I am sure, so long as thou showest no kindness to the devil he cannot hurt thee, because he cannot accuse thee; take up, therefore, holy Job's resolution, Job xxvii., 'My righteousness I hold fast: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.' It is never sad, indeed, with the soul, till the barking is within doors; conscience, not the devil, is the bloodhound that pulls down the creature. Oh, let not that reproach thee, and thou art well enough!

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN IS SHEWED, WHAT IT IS FOR A CHRISTIAN TO STAND IN ORDER, TOGETHER WITH HIS DUTY IN THIS PARTICULAR, AND THE DANGER OF STRAGGLERS FROM THEIR OWN PLACE.

SECONDLY, 'To stand,' amounts to as much as to stand every one in his rank and proper station, and is here opposed to all disorder or straggling from our place. When a captain sees his soldiers march or fight out of their rank and order, then he bids 'Stand.' Military discipline is so strict in this case, that it allows none to stir from their place without special warrant. It hath cost some their lives for fighting out of their place, though with great success. Manlius killed his own son for no other fault. From hence the note is:

Note. That it should be the care of every Christian to stand orderly in the particular place wherein God hath set him. The devil's method is first to rout, and then to ruin. Order supposeth company, one that walks alone cannot go out of his rank. This place, therefore, and rank wherein the Christian is to stand, relates to some society or company in which he walks. The Christian may be considered relating to a threefold society—church, commonwealth, and family. In all there are several ranks and places. In the church, officers and private members. In the commonwealth, magistrates, and people. In the family,

Digitized by Google

masters and servants; parents and children; husband and wife. The welfare of these societies consisteth in the order that is kept, when every wheel moves in its place without clashing, when every one contributes by performing the duty of his place to the benefit of the whole society; but more distinctly, then a person stands orderly in his place, when he doth these three things:

First, When he understands the peculiar duty of his place and relation. 'The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way,' Prov. xiv. 8. His way, that is, the way which he in particular is to walk. It will not profit a man to know the way to York, if going to London; yet how prone are we to study another's way and work than our own! The servant what his master's duty is, not what his is to his master. The people what the minister in his place should do, rather than what is incumbent on themselves to such as are over them in the Lord. It is not knowing another's duty, no, nor censuring the negligence of another, but doing our own that will bring us safely and comfortably to our journey's end; and how can we do it except we know it? Solomon in no one thing gave a greater proof of his wisdom, than in asking of God wisdom to enable him for the duty of his place.

Secondly, When knowing the duty of our place, we conscientiously attend to it and lay out ourselves for God therein. What Paul charged Timothy in his place, that every Christian must do in his; he must meditate on these things, and give himself wholly to the discharge of his duty as a Christian in such a place and calling, *en toutois isthi*, 1 Tim. iv. 15, 'be in them,' let thy heart be on thy work, and thou wholly taken up about it. The very power of godliness lies in this. Religion, if not made practicable in our several places and callings, becomes ridiculous, and vanisheth into an empty notion that is next to nothing. Yet many there are that have nothing to prove themselves Christians, but a naked profession, of whom we may say as they do of the cinnamon-tree, that the bark is more worth than all they have besides. Such the apostle speaks of, Tit. i. 16: 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.' What good works the apostle means, will appear by the next words, chap. ii. 1, where in opposition to these he presseth those duties which Christians, in their particular places and relations (as becometh holiness) ought to perform. A good Christian, and a disobedient wife; a godly man, and an unfaithful servant, or undutiful child; is a contradiction that can never be reconciled. He that walks not uprightly in his house, is but a hypocrite at church. He that is not a Christian in his shop, is not in his closet a Christian, though upon his knees in prayer. Wound religion in one part, and it is felt in every part. If it declines one way, it cannot thrive in any other. All that miscarry in religion, do not the same way miscarry. As it is in the regard of our natural life, some, it is observed, die upwards, some downwards. In one, the extreme parts; his feet are first dead, and so creeps up the legs, and so at last takes hold on the vitals; in another his superior parts are first invaded. Thus is profession, some, their declining appears first in a negligence of duties about their particular callings, and duties they owe by their place and relation to man, who all this while seem very forward and zealous in the duties of worship to God, much in hearing, praying, and such like; others falter first in these, and at the same time seem very strict in the other; both destructive alike to the soul, they both meet in the ruin of the power of godliness. He stands orderly that makes conscience of the whole duty that lies on him in his place to God or man,

Thirdly, To stand orderly, it is requisite that we keep the bounds of our place and calling. The Israelites were commanded 'to pitch every man by his own standard,' Numb. ii. 2. The Septuagint translates it, *kata tagma*, according to order. God allows no stragglers from their station in his army of saints. 'As the Lord hath called every man, so let him walk,' 1 Cor. vii. 17. Our walk must be in that path which our call beats out. We are, therefore, commanded every one 'to do his own business,' 1 Thess. iv. 11. That which is the commander's business in an army, is not the private soldier's; the magistrate's, not the subject's; the minister's, not the people's. That which is justice in the ruler, is murder in another. They are our own things, that come within the compass of our general or particular calling; out of these, we are out of our diocese. O what a quiet world we should have, if everything and

Digitized by Google

person knew his own place! If the sea kept its own place, we should have no inundations; if men had theirs, we should neither have seen such floods of sin, nor miseries, as this unhappy age has been almost drowned with. But it must be a strong bank, indeed, that can contain our fluid spirits within our own terms. Peter himself was sharply chid, for prying out of curiosity into that which concerned him not. 'What is that to thee?' John xxi. 22; as if Christ had said Peter, meddle with thy own matters, this concerns not thee; which sharp rebuke, saith one, might possibly make Peter afterwards give so strict a charge against, and set so black a brand upon this very sin, as you may find, 1 Pet. iv. 15, where he ranks the busybody among murderers and thieves.

Now to fix every one in his place, and persuade all to stand orderly there without breaking their rank, these five considerations, methinks, may carry some weight, among those especially with whom the word of God in the Scripture yet keeps its authority to conclude and determine their thoughts.

1. Consider, What thou doest out of thy place is not acceptable to God, because thou canst not do it in faith, 'without which it is impossible to please God;' and it cannot be in faith, because thou hast no call. God will not thank thee for doing that which he did not set thee about; possibly thou hast good intentions; so had Uzzah in staying the ark, yet how well God liked his zeal, see 2 Sam. vi. 7. Saul himself could make a fair story of his sacrificing, but that served not his turn. It concerns us, not only to ask ourselves, what the thing is we do? but also, who requireth this at our hands? To be sure, God will at last put us upon that question, and it will go ill with us if we cannot shew our commission. So long we must needs neglect what is our duty, as we are busy about that which is not. The spouse confesseth this, Cant. i. 6: 'They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept;' she could not mind theirs and her own too; our own iron will cool while we are heating another's. And this must needs be displeasing to God, to leave the work God sets us about, to do that he never commanded. When a master calls a truant scholar to account, that he hath been missing some days from school, would this be a good plea for him to tell his master, that he was all the while in such a man's shop at work with his tools? No, sure his business lay at school, not in that shop.

2. By going out of our proper place and calling, we put ourselves from under God's protection: the promise is, he will keep us in 'all our ways,' Psalm xci. 11. When we go out of our way, we go from under his wing. We have an excellent place for this, 1 Cor. vii. 24; 'Let every one wherein he is called, therein abide with God.' Mark that phrase, 'abide with God.' As we love to walk in God's company, we must abide in our place and calling; every step from that is a departure from God: and better to stay at home in a mean place, and low calling, wherein we may enjoy God's sweet presence, than go to court, and there live without him. It is likely you have heard of that holy bishop, that in a journey came to an inn; and by some discourse with the host, finding him to be an atheist, or very atheistical, presently calls for his servant to bring him his horse, saying he would not lodge there, for God was not in that place. Truly, when thou art in any place, or about any work to which thou art not called, we may safely say, God is not in that place or enterprise; and what a bold adventure is it to stay there, where you cannot expect his presence to assist, or protect! 'As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place,' Prov. xxvii. 8. God took special care, that the 'bird sitting over her eggs in her nest' should not be hurt, Deut. xxii. 6; but we find nothing to secure her if found abroad. In doing the duty of our place, we have heaven's word for our security; but upon our own peril be it if we wander; then we are like Shimei out of his precincts, and lay ourselves open to some judgment or other: it is alike dangerous to do what we are not called to, and to neglect or leave undone the duty of our place. As the earth could not bear Korah's usurpation of what belonged not to them, but swallowed them up; so the sea could not but bear witness against Jonah, the runaway prophet, disdaining to waft him that fled from his place and work that God called him to. Nay, heaven itself would not harbour the angels, when once they left their own place and office that their Maker had appointed; so those words, Jude 6, I find most probably interpreted. The ruin of

Digitized by Google

many souls break in upon them at this door. First they break their ranks, and then they are led further into temptation. Absalom first looks over the hedge in his ambitious thought; a king he would be; and this wandering desire beyond his place lets in those bloody sins, robellion, incest, and murder; and these ripened him for, and at last delivered him up into the hand of Divine vengeance. The apostle joins order and stedfastness together, Col. ii. 5: 'I am with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith.' If an army stands in close order, every one in his place attending his duty, content with his work, it is in a manner impregnable. How came many in our days to fall from their stedfastness, but by breaking their order.

3. We shall never be charged for not doing another's work: 'Give an account of thy stewardship,' Luke xvi. 2; that is, of what by thy place thou wert intrusted with. We may indeed be accessory to another's sin and miscarriage in his place. 'Be not partakers with them,' saith the apostle, Eph. v. 7. There is a partnership, if not very watchful, that we may have with others's sins, and therefore we may say Amen to that holy man's prayer, 'Lord, forgive me my other sins.' Merchants can trade in bottoms that are not their own, and we may sin with other men's hands many ways, and one especially is, when we do not lend our brother that assistance in his work and duty which our place and relation obligeth to; but it is not our sin that we do not supply others' negligence, by doing that which belongs not to our place. We are to pray for magistrates, that they may rule in the fear of God; but if they do not, we may not step upon the bench and do his work for him. God requires no more than faithfulness in our place. We do not find fault with an apple-tree if it be laden with apples, which is the fruit of its own kind, though we can find no figs or grapes growing on it: we expect these only from their proper root and stock. He is a fruitful tree in God's orchard that brings forth his fruit in his season, Psa. i. 3.

4. There is poor comfort in suffering for doing that which was not the work of our place and calling. Before we launch out into any undertaking, it behoves us to ask ourselves, and that seriously, what our tackling is, if a storm should overtake us in our voyage. It is folly to engage in that enterprise which will not bear us out, and pay the charge of all the loss and trouble it can put us to. Now, no comfort or countenance from God can be expected in any suffering, except we can entitle him to the business we suffer for. 'For thy sake are we killed all the day long,' saith the church, Psa. xliv. 22. But if suffering finds us out of our calling and place, we cannot say, 'For thy sake' we are thus and thus afflicted, but for our own sakes; and you know the proverb, 'Self do, self have.' The apostle makes a vast difference between suffering as a 'busybody' and suffering as a 'Christian,' 1 Pet. iv. 15, 16. It is to the latter he saith, 'Let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf;' as for the busybody, he mates him with thieves and murderers; and those, I trow, have reason both to be ashamed and afraid. The carpenter that gets a cut or wound on his leg from his axe, as he is at work in his calling, may bear it more patiently and comfortably than one that is wantonly meddling with his tools, and hath nothing to do with such work. When affliction or persecution overtakes the Christian travelling in the way God hath set him in, he may shew the Bible, as that holy man (suffering for Christ) did, and say, 'This hath made me poor, this hath brought me to prison;' that is, his faith on the truths, and obedience to the commands in it, and therefore may confidently expect to suffer at God's cost, as the soldier to be kept and maintained by his prince, in whose service he hath lost his limbs. But the other, that runs out of his place, and so meets with sufferings, he hath this to embitter them, that he can look for nothing from God, but to be soundly chid for his pains, as the child is served that gets some hurt while he is gadding abroad, and when he comes home at night with his battered face meets with a whipping from his father into the bargain for being from home. This lay heavy on the spirit of that learned German, Johannes Funccius, who of a minister of the gospel in his prince's court, turned minister of state to his prince; and was at last, for some evil counsel (at least so judged), condemned to die. Before he suffered, he much lamented the leaving of his calling, and to warn others left this distich:—

Digitized by Google

To keep thy place and calling learn of me:
Flee as the plague a meddler for to be.

5. It is an erratic spirit, that usually carries men out of their place and calling. I confess there is an *heroicus impetus*, an impulse which some of the servants of God have had from heaven, to do things extraordinary, as we read in Scripture of Moses, Gideon, Phineas, and others. But it is dangerous to pretend to the like, and unlawful to expect such immediate commissions from Heaven now, when he issueth them out in a more ordinary way, and gives rules for the same in his word; we may as well expect to be taught extraordinarily, without using the ordinary means, as to be called so. When I see any miraculously gifted, as the prophets and apostles, then I shall think the immediate calling they pretend to is authentic. To be sure, we find in the word, extraordinary calling and extraordinary teaching go together. Well, let us see what that erratic spirit is which carries many out of their place and calling. It is not always the same; sometimes it is idleness. First, men neglect what they should do, and then are easily persuaded to meddle with what they have nothing to do. The apostle intimates this plainly, 1 Tim. v. 13: 'They learn to be idle, wandering from house to house, and not only idle, but busybodies.' An idle person is a gadder; he hath his foot on the threshold, easily drawn from his own place, and as soon into another's diocese. He is at leisure to hear the devil's chat. He that will not serve God in his own place, the devil, rather than he shall stand out, will send him of his errand, and get him to put his sickle into another's corn. Secondly, it is pride and discontent that makes persons go out of their place; some men are in this very unhappy, their spirits are too big and haughty for the place God hath set them in. Their calling, may be, is mean and low, but their spirits high and towering; and whereas they should labour to bring their hearts to their condition, they project how they may bring their condition to their proud hearts. They think themselves very unhappy while they are shut up in such strait limits; (indeed the whole world is too narrow a walk for a proud heart, *Æstuat infœlix angusto limite mundi;* the world was but a little case to Alexander); shall they be hid in a crowd, lie in an obscure corner, and die before they let the world know their worth? No, they cannot brook it, and therefore they must get on the stage, and put forth themselves one way or other. It was not the priests' *work* that Korah and his accomplices were so in love with, but the priests' honour which attended the work; this they desired to share, and liked not to see others run away with it from them; nor was it the zeal that Absalom had to do justice, which made his teeth water so after his father's crown, though this must silver over his ambition. These places of church and state are such fair flowers, that proud spirits in all ages have been ambitious to have them set in their own garden, though they never thrive so well as in their proper soil. In a third it is unbelief: this made Uzzah stretch forth his hand unadvisedly to stay the ark that shook, which being not a Levite he was not to touch. See Numb. iv. 15. Alas! good man, it was his faith shook more dangerously than the ark; by fearing the fall of this, he fell to the ground himself. God needs not our sin to shore up his glory, truth, or church. Lastly, in some it is misinformed zeal: many think they may do a thing because they can do it. They can preach, and therefore they may; wherefore else have they gifts? Certainly the gifts of the saints need not be lost any of them, though they be not laid out in the minister's work. The private Christian hath a large field wherein he may be serviceable to his brethren; he need not break the hedge which God hath set, and thereby occasion such disorder as we see to be the consequence of this. We read in the Jewish law, Exod. xxii., that he who set a hedge on fire, and that fire burnt the corn standing in a field, was to make restitution, though he only fired the hedge, perhaps not intending to hurt the corn: and the reason was, because his firing the hedge was an occasion of the corn's being burnt, though he meant it not. I dare not say, that every private Christian who hath in these times taken upon him the minister's work, did intend to make such a combustion in the church as hath been, and still sadly is among us. God forbid I should think so! But, O that I could clear them from being accessory to it, in that they have fired the hedge which God hath set between the minister's calling and people's. If we will acknow-

Digitized by Google

ledge the ministry a particular office in the church of Christ,—and this I think the word will compel us to do,—then we must also confess it is not any one's work, though never so able, except called to the office. There are many in a kingdom to be found, that could do the prince's errand, it is like, as well as his ambassador, but none takes the place but he that is sent, and can shew his letters credential. Those that are not sent and commissionated by God's call for ministerial work, they may speak truths as well as they that are; yet of him that acts by virtue of his calling, we may say that he preacheth with authority, and not like those that can shew no commission but what the opinion themselves have of their own abilities gives them. Dost thou like the minister's work? Why shouldst thou not desire the office, that thou mayest do the work acceptably? Thou dost find thyself gifted, as thou thinkest, for the work, but were not the church more fit to judge so than thyself? And if thou shouldst be found so by them appointed for the trial, who would not give thee the right hand of fellowship? There are not so many labourers in Christ's field, but thy help, if able, would be accepted; but as now thou actest, thou bringest thyself into suspicion in the thoughts of sober Christians, as he would justly do, who comes into the field, where his prince hath an army, and gives out he comes to do his sovereign service against the common enemy, yet stands by himself at the head of a troop he hath got together, and refuseth to take any commission from his prince's officers, or join himself with them: I question whether the service such a one can perform, should he mean as he says, which is to be feared, would do so much good, as the distraction which this his carriage might cause in the army would do hurt.

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN IS CONTAINED THE THIRD AND LAST IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD 'STAND,' AND THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY OF STANDING ON HIS WATCH SPOKEN TO; WHY HE IS TO WATCH, AND HOW HE SHOULD.

THIRDLY, 'To stand,' here is opposed to sleep and sloth; standing is a waking, watching posture; when the captain sees his soldiers lying secure upon the ground asleep, he bids 'Stand to your arms,' that is, stand and watch. In some cases it is death for a soldier to be found asleep, as when he is appointed to stand sentinel, or the like; now to sleep, deserves death, because he is to wake, that the whole army may sleep; and his sleep may cost them their lives; therefore a great captain thought he gave that soldier but his due, whom he run through with his sword, because he found him asleep when he should have stood sentinel, excusing his severity with this, that he left him but as he found him; *Mortuum inveni, et mortuum reliqui:* 'I found him dead in sleep, and left him but asleep in death. Watchfulness is more needed for the Christian soldier than any other, because other soldiers fight with men that need sleep as well as themselves; but the Christian's grand enemy, Satan, is ever awake, and walking his rounds, seeking whom he may surprise. And if Satan be always awake, it is dangerous for the Christian at any time to be spiritually asleep, that is, secure and careless. The Christian is seldom worsted, by this his enemy, but there is either treachery or negligence in the business; either the unregenerate part betrays him, or his grace is not wakeful to make a timely discovery of him, so as to prepare for the encounter; the enemy is upon him before he is thoroughly awake to draw his sword. The saint's sleeping time is Satan's tempting time; every fly dares venture to creep on a sleeping lion. No temptation so weak, but is strong enough to foil a Christian that is napping in security. Samson asleep, and Delilah cut his locks. Saul asleep, and the spear is taken away from his very side, and he never the wiser. Noah asleep, and his graceless son has a fit time to discover his father's nakedness. Eutychus asleep, nods, and falls from the third loft, and is taken up for dead. Thus the Christian asleep in security may soon be surprised so as to lose much of his spiritual strength, ('the joy of the Lord, which is his strength'), be robbed of his spear, his armour, graces I mean, at least in the present use of them, and his nakedness discovered by graceless men, to the shame of his profession; as, when bloody Joab could take notice of David's vain-glory in numbering the people, was not David's grace asleep? Yea, he may fall from a high loft of profession, so low, into

Digitized by Google

such scandalous practices, that others may question whether there be any life of grace indeed in him. And therefore it behoves the Christian to stand wakefully; sleep steals as insensibly on the soul, as it doth on the body. The wise virgins fell asleep as well as the foolish, though not so soundly; take heed thou dost not indulge thyself in thy lazy distemper, but stir thyself to action, as we bid one that is drowsy, stand up, or walk. Yield to it by idleness and sloth, and it will grow upon thee; bestir thyself in this duty and that, and it will be over. David first awakes his tongue to sing, his hand to play on his harp, and then David's heart awakes also, Psa. li. 8. The lion, it is said, when he first wakes, lashes himself with his tail, thereby to stir and rouse up his courage, and then away he goes after his prey: we have enough to excite and provoke us to use all the care and diligence possible.

First, The Christian's work is too curious to be done well between sleeping and walking, and too important to be done ill, and slubbered over, no matter how. He had need be awake that walks upon the brink of a deep river, or brow of a steep hill. The Christian's path is so narrow, and the danger is so great, that it calls for both a nimble eye to discern, and a steady eye to direct, but a sleepy eye can do neither. Look upon any duty or grace, and you will find it lie between Scylla and Charybdis, two extremes alike dangerous. Faith, the great work of God, cuts its way between the mountain of presumption and gulf of despair; patience, a grace so necessary that we cannot be without it a day, except we would be all that while besides ourselves; this keeps us that we fall neither into the sleepy apoplexy of a blockish stupidity, which deprives the creature of its senses; nor into a raging fit of discontent, which hath sense enough, and too much, to feel the hand of God, but deprives the man of his reason, that he turns again upon God, and shoots back the Almighty's arrows on his fiery face in the fury of his froward spirit. The like we might say of the rest. No truth but hath some error next door to her; no duty can be performed without approaching very near the enemy's quarters, who soon takes the alarm, and comes out to oppose the Christian; and ought he not then to have always his heart on the watch?

Secondly, The trouble of watching is not comparable to the advantage it brings.

First, By this, thou frustratest the designs Satan hath upon thee: it is worth watching to keep the house from robbing, much more the heart from rifling by the devil. 'Watch, that ye enter not into temptation,' Matt. xxvi. 41. He buys his sleep dear, that pays his throat outting for it; yea, though the wound be not so deep, but may be cured at last. Thy not watching one night, may keep thee awake many a night upon a more uncomfortable occasion. And hadst thou not better wake with care to keep thyself from a mischief, than afterwards thy eyes be held open, whether thou wilt or not, with pain and anguish of the wound given thee in thy sleep? You know how sadly David was bruised by a fall got in his spiritual slumber; for what else was he, when in the eventide he rose from his bed, and walked upon the roof of his house, like a man walking in his sleep? 2 Sam. xi. 2; and how many restless nights this brought over this holy man's head, you may perceive by his own mournful complaints of this sin, which is the foot and sad burden of several mournful psalms.

Secondly, By thy watchfulness thou shall best learn the evil of a sleepy state; one asleep is not sensible of his own snorting, how uncomely and troublesome to others it is; but he that is awake is apprehensive of both. The man asleep is not sensible, if laid naked by some that would abuse him; but he that is awake, observe, is ashamed, and covers him; thus while thou art in a spiritual sense awake, thou canst not but observe many uncomely passages in the lives of those professors, who do not watch their hearts, which will fill thy heart with pity to them, to see how they are abused by Satan and their own passions, which, like rude servants, take this their own time to play their pranks in, when they have made sure of their mistress, (grace I mean, now laid asleep,) that should keep them in better rule: yea, it will make the blood come into thy face for shame to see how by their nakedness, profession itself is flouted at, by those that pass by, and see how it is with them. Well, what thou

Digitized by Google

blushest to see, and pitiest to find in another, take heed it befall not thyself; if thou sufferest a spiritual slumber to grow upon thee, thou wilt be the man thyself that all this may come upon, and what not besides? Sleep levels all; the wise man then is no wiser than a fool, to project for his safety; nor the strong man better than the weak, to defend himself: if slumber falls once upon thy eye, it is night with thee, and thou art, though the best of saints, but as other men, so far as this sleep prevails on thee.

Thirdly, By thy watchfulness thou shalt invite such company in unto thee, as will make the time short and sweet, and that is thy precious Saviour, whose sweet communication and discourse, about the things of thy Father's kingdom, will make thou shalt not grudge the ease sleepy Christians get, with the loss of such a heavenly entertainment as thou enjoyest. Who had not, that loves his soul better than his body, rather have David's song than David's sleep in the night? And who had not rather have Christ's comforting presence with a waking soul, than his absence with a sleepy, slothful one? It is the watchful soul that Christ delights to be with, and open his heart unto. We do not choose that for the time of giving our friends a visit, when they are asleep in their beds; nay, if we be with them, and perceive they grow sleepy, we think it is time to leave them to their pillow, and verily Christ doth so too. Christ withdraws from the spouse, till she be better awake, as a fitter time for her to receive his loves. Put the sweetest wine into a sleepy man's hand, and you are like to have it all spilled; yea, put a purse of gold into his hand, and the man will hardly remember in the morning what you gave him over night. Thus in the sleepy state of a soul, both the Christian loseth the benefit, and Christ the praise of his mercy; and therefore Christ will stay to give out his choice favours, when the soul is more wakeful, that he may both do the creature good, and his creature may speak good of him for it.

Quest. But how must the Christian stand upon his watch?

Answ. First, constantly. The lamp of God in the tabernacle was to 'burn always,' Exod. xxvii. 20, and xxx. 8; that is, always in the night, which sense is favoured by several other places. And I pray, what is our life in this world but a dark night of temptation? Take heed, Christian, that thy watch-candle go not out in any part of this darksome time, lest thy enemy come upon thee in that hour. He can find thee, but not thou resist him in the dark; if once thy eye be shut in a spiritual slumber, thou art a fair mark for his wrath; and know, thou canst not be long off thy watch, but the devil will hear on it. The devil knew the apostle's sleeping time, and then he desires leave to winnow them, Luke xxii. He saw they were in some disorder; the eye of their soul began to be heavy: the thief riseth when honest men go to bed. The devil, I am sure, begins to tempt when saints cease to watch; when the staff is thrown away, then the wolf appears. When the soul puts her danger furthest off, and lies most secure, then it is nearest; therefore labour to be constant in thy holy care; the want of this spoils all. Some you shall have, that after a great fall into a sin that hath bruised them sorely, will seem very careful for a time where they set their foot, how they walk, and what company they come in; but as soon as the soreness of their consciences wears off, their watch is broke up, and they are as careless as ever; like one that is very careful to shut up his shop strongly, and may be sit up late to watch it also, for two or three nights after it hath been robbed, but then minds it no more. Others in an affliction, or newly come out of the furnace, O how nice and scrupulous are they while the smell of fire is about them, and memory of their distress fresh! They are as tender of sinning as one that comes out of a hot, close room is of the air; they shrink at every breath of temptation stirring; but alas, how soon are they hardened to commit those sins without remorse, the bare motion of which, but a little before, did so trouble and afflict them! Josephus, in his 'Antiquities,' tells us, that the sons of Noah, for some years after the flood, dwelt on the tops of high mountains, not daring to take up their habitation in the lower ground, for fear of being drowned by another flood; yet in process of time, seeing no flood came, they ventured down to the plain of Shinar, where their former fear we see ended in one of the boldest, proudest attempts against God that the sun was ever witness to; the building, I mean, of a tower, whose top should reach heaven, Gen. xi. 2, 3. They, who at first were so maidenly

Digitized by Google

and fearful, as not to venture down their hills, for fear of drowning, now have a design to secure themselves against all future attempts from the God of heaven himself. Thus oft we see God's judgments leave such an impression in men's spirits, that for a while they stand aloof from their sins, as they on their hills, afraid to come down to them; but when they see fair weather continue, and no clouds gather towards another storm, then they can descend to their old wicked practices, and grow more bold and heaven-daring than ever. But if thou wilt be a Christian indeed, keep on thy watch still, remit not in thy care; thou hast well run hitherto, O lie not down, like some lazy traveller, by the way-side to sleep, but reserve thy resting-time till thou gettest home out of all danger. Thy God rested not till the last day's work in the creation was finished; neither do thou cease to wake or work, till thou canst say, thy salvation-work is finished.

Secondly, Watch universally. First, watch thy whole man. The honest watchman walks the rounds, and compasseth the whole town. He doth not limit his care to this house or that. So do thou watch over thy whole man. A pore in thy body is a door wide enough to let in a disease, if God command; and any one faculty of thy soul, or member of thy body, to let in an enemy that may endanger thy spiritual welfare. Alas, how few set the watch round! some one faculty is not guarded, or member of the body not regarded. He that is scrupulous in one, you shall find him secure in another: may be thou settest a watch at the door of thy lips, that no impure communication offends the ears of men; but how is the 'Lord's watch' kept at the temple door of thy heart? 2 Chron. xxiii. 6. Is not that defiled with lust? Thou perhaps keepest thy hand out of thy neighbour's purse, and foot from going on a thievish errand to thy neighbour's house; but does not thy envious heart grudge him what God allows him? When thou prayest, thou art very careful thy outward posture be reverent; but what eye hast thou on thy soul, that it performs its part in the duty? Secondly, watch in everything: if the apostle bids 'in everything give thanks,' then it behoves us in everything to watch, that God may not lose his praise, which he doth in most, for want of watching. No action so little, almost, but we may in it do God or the devil some service, and therefore none too little for our care to be bestowed on. He was a holy man indeed, of whom it was said, 'that he ate and drank eternal life.' The meaning is, he kept such holy watch over himself in these things, that he was in heaven while doing them. There is no creature so little among all God's works but his providence watcheth over it, even to a sparrow and a hair. Let there be no word or work of thine over which thou art not watchful. Thou shalt be judged by them, even to thy idle words and thoughts; and wilt thou not have care of them?

Thirdly, Watch wisely; which thou shalt do, if thou knowest where thou shouldst keep strictest watch, and that must be first in the weightiest duty of the command: 'tything of cummin and anise' must not be neglected, but take heed thou dost not neglect the weightiest things of the 'law, judgment, mercy,' and 'faith,' Matt. xxiii. 23, making your preciseness in the less a blind for your horrible wickedness in the greater.

Begin at the right end of your work, Christian, by placing your chief care about those main duties to God and man, in his law and gospel, in his worship, and in thy daily course, which when thou hast done, neglect not the circumstantials. Should a master, before he goes forth, charge his servant to look to his child, and trim his house up handsomely against he comes home, when he returns will he thank his servant for sweeping his house, and making it trim, as he bid him, if he find his child through his negligence fallen into the fire, and by it killed or crippled? No, sure, he left his child with him as his chief charge, to which the other should have yielded, if both could not be done. There hath been a great zeal of late among us, about some circumstantials of worship; but who looks to the little child, the main duties of Christianity, I mean. Was there ever less love, charity, self-denial, heavenly-mindedness, or the power of holiness in any of its several walks, than in this sad age of ours? Alas! these, like the child, are in great danger of perishing in the fire of contention and division, which a perverse zeal in less things hath kindled among us. Secondly, Be sure thou art watchful more than ordinary over thyself, in

Digitized by Google

those things where thou findest thyself weakest and hast been oftenest foiled. The weakest part of the city needs the strongest guard, and in our bodies the tenderest part is most observed and kept warmest. And I should think it were strange, if thy fabric of grace stands so strong and even, that thou shouldst not soon perceive which side needs the shore most, by some inclination of it one way more than another. Thy body is not so firm, but thou findest this humour over-abound, and that part craze faster than another; and so mayest thou in thy soul. Well, take counsel in the thing, and what thou findest weakest, watch most carefully. Is it thy head that is weak, thy judgment I mean? Watch thyself, and come not among those that drink no wine but that which thy weak parts cannot bear, (seraphic notions and high-flown opinions,) and do not think thyself much wronged to be forbidden their cup? such strong wine is more heady than hearty, and they that trade most with it are not found of the healthiest tempers of their souls, no more than they that live most of strong waters are for their bodies. Is thy impotency in thy passions? Indeed we are weak as they are strong and violent. Now watch over them, as one that dwells in a thatched house would do of every spark that flies out of his chimney, lest it should light on it, and set all on fire. O take heed what speeches come from thy mouth, or from any thou convers'st with; this is the little instrument sets the whole course of nature on flame. When our neighbour's house is on fire, we cast water on our roof, or cover it with a wet sheet; when the flame breaks out at another's mouth, now look thou throwest water on thy own hot spirit; some cooling, wrath-quenching scriptures and arguments ever carry with thee for that purpose, and so in any other particular, as thou findest thy weakness.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE 14. *Having your loins girt about with truth.*

The apostle having ordered the Ephesians, and in them every Christian, the posture which they are to observe in fight with their enemy; he comes now to instance, in several pieces of that armour, which before he had commanded to them only in general. The first of which is the 'girdle of truth.'

Wherein is contained a brief explication of the words.

'Having your loins girt about with truth.' A twofold inquiry is here requisite. First, what he means by 'truth.' Secondly, what by 'loins,' and their being girt with truth.

First, For the first. What is 'truth' here? Some by 'truth' understand Christ, who indeed elsewhere is called 'truth;' yet in this place I conceive not so properly, because the apostle instanceth here in several pieces and parts of armour, one distinct from another; and Christ cannot so well be said to be a single piece to defend this or that part, as the whole in whom we are complete; compared, therefore, Rom. xiii., to the whole suit of armour; 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus;' that is, be clothed and harnessed with Christ, as a soldier with his armour cap-a-pie. Some by truth mean, 'truth of doctrine:' others will have it, 'truth of heart, sincerity;' they, I think best, that comprise both. And so I shall handle it; both indeed are required to make the girdle complete; one will not do without the other. It is possible to find good meanings, and a kind of sincerity without, yea, against the truth. Many follow an error, as they Absalom, in the simplicity of their hearts. Such do ill while they mean well. Good intentions do no more make a good action, than a fair mark makes a good shot by an unskilful archer. God did not like Saul's zeal when he persecuted the Christian church, though he thought, no question, he did him good service therein. Neither is it enough to have truth on our side, if we have not truth in our hearts. Jehu was a great stickler against idolatry, but kicked down all again by his hypocrisy. Both then are necessary; sincerity to propound a right end, and knowledge of the word of truth, to direct us in the right way to that end.

Secondly, What is meant here by loins that are to be girt with this girdle? The loins must be like the girdle. This is spiritual, and therefore they must be so. Peter will help to interpret Paul; 'Gird up the loins of your minds,' 1 Pet. i. 13. They are our minds and spirits which must wear this girdle, and very

Digitized by Google

fitly may our spirits and mind be compared to our loins. The loins are the chief seat of bodily strength. Of Behemoth it is said, Job xl. 6, 'His strength is in his loins.' The loins are the body, as *carina navi*, the keel to the ship; the whole ship is knit to that, and sustained by it; and the body to the loins; if the loins fail, the whole body sinks. Hence, to 'smite through the loins;' is a phrase to express destruction and ruin, Duet. xxxiii. 11, weak loins, and a weak man. If we be but a little weary, nature directs us to lay our hands on our loins to sustain them, as our chief strength. Thus, as the actings of our minds and spirits are in their faculties and powers, so we are weak or strong Christians; if the understanding be clear in its apprehensions of truth, and the will sincere, vigorous, and fixed in its purposes, for that which is holy and good, then he is a strong Christain. But if the understanding be dark, or uncertain in its notions, as a distempered eye that cannot well discern its object, and the will be wavering and unsteady, like a needle that trembles between two loadstones, not able to bring its thoughts to an issue, which to close with; here the man is weak, and all he doth will be so. Feeble spirits cause an intermitting, faltering pulse; so want of strength in the mind, to know truth, and resolution in the will to pursue that which he knows to be holy and good, causeth a man to falter in his course. The use therefore of these two,—truth of doctrine for the mind, and sincerity for the will,—is to unite and establish both these faculties, which they do when they are clasped, and girt about the soul, as the girdle about the loins of the body. Though the loins be the strength of the body, yet they need an auxilary,—their strength from the girdle,—to keep those parts close, and unite their force; without which, men, when they would strain themselves, and put forth their strength in any work, find a trembling and loosenes in their loins Hence, the 'shaking of the loins,' is a phrase to express weakness, Psa. lxix. 23. Thus our minds and spirits need this girdle to strengthen them in every work we do, or else we shall act nothing vigorously.

First, We shall begin with truth of doctrine, or truth of the word, called 'the word of truth,' Ephes. t. 13, because it is the word of God, who is God of truth. It behoves every Christian to be well girt with this truth. 'Resist the devil,' saith Peter, 'steadfast in the faith,' 1 Pet. v. 9; that is, in the truth; faith being there put for the object of our faith, which is the truth of God declared in the doctrine of the gospel; this is 'the faith which was once delivered to the saints,' Jude 10; that is, the truth delivered to them to be believed and held fast. And of what importance is it to be thus steadfast in the faith, the apostle Peter, in the following verse of the afore-mentioned place, shews by his vehement and earnest praying for them, that God would 'stablish, strengthen, and settle them.' The heaping of words to the same purpose implies the great danger they were in of being unsetted by Satan and his instruments, and the necessity of their standing firm and unshaken in the faith. Nothing is more frequently inculcated than this in the Epistles, and the more, because in those blustering times it was impossible to have kept the faith from being blown from them, without this girdle to hold it fast. Now, as there is a double design Satan hath to rob Christians of truth, so there is a two-fold girding about with this truth necessary.

First, Satan comes as a serpent, in the persons of false teachers, and by them labours to put a cheat on us, and cozen us with error for truth. To defend us, against this design, it is necessary we be girt with truth in our understanding, that we have an established judgment in the truths of Christ.

Secondly, Satan comes sometimes as a lion, in the persons of bloody persecutors, and labours to scare Christians from the truth, with fire and faggot. Now to defend us against this, we need have truth girt about us, so that with a holy resolution we may maintain our profession in the face of death and danger. To begin with the first.

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN, IT IS THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO LABOUR FOR A JUDGMENT ESTABLISHED IN THE TRUTH; WITH THE REASONS OF IT, AS ALSO, SOME APPLICATION OF THE POINT.

It should be the care of every Christian to get an established judgment in the truth. The Bereans are highly commended for the inquiry they made into the

Digitized by Google

Scripture, to satisfy their judgments concerning the doctrine Paul preached. They did not believe hand over head, but their faith was the result of a judgment, upon diligent search, convinced by Scripture evidence, Acts xvii. 11: it is said there, 'They searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so.' They carried the preacher's doctrine to the written word, and compared it with that; and mark, ver. 12, 'Therefore many believed;' as they did not believe before, so they durst not but believe now. I remember Tertullian, speaking of some heretics, their manner of preaching, saith, *Persuadendo docent, non docendo persuadent:* 'they teach by persuading, and not persuade by teaching:' that is, they woo and entice the affections of their hearers, without convincing of their judgment about what they preach. Indeed it were a hard work for the adulterer to convince her he would ruin, that the fact is lawful. No, he goes another way to work. First, he inveigles her affections, and they once bewitched, the other is not so much questioned, it being easy for the affections to make the judgment of their party. Well, though error, like a thief, comes thus in at the window, yet truth, like the true owner of the house, delights to enter at the right door of understanding, from thence into the conscience, and so passeth into the will and affections. Indeed he that hits upon truth, and takes up the profession of it, before he is brought into the acquaintance of its excellency and heavenly beauty by his understanding, cannot entertain it, becoming its heavenly birth and descent; it is as a prince that travels in disguise, not known, therefore not honoured. Truth is loved and prized only of those that know it: and not to desire to know it, is to despise it, as much as knowing it, to reject it. It were not hard sure to cheat that man of truth, who knows not what he hath. Truth and error are all one to the ignorant man, so it hath but the name of truth. Leah and Rachel were both alike to Jacob in the dark. Indeed, it is said, 'In the morning, behold it was Leah,' Gen. xxix. 25. So in the morning, when it is day in the understanding, then the deceived person will see he hath had a false bride in his bosom; will cry out, Behold it is an error which I took for a truth. You have may be heard of the covetous man, that hugged himself in the many bags of gold he had, but never opened them, nor used them: when the thief took away his gold, and left him his bags full of pebbles in the room, he was as happy as when he had his gold, for he looked not at the one or other. And verily an ignorant person is in a manner no better with truth than error on his side. Both are alike to him, day and night, all one to a blind man.

But to proceed, and give some more particular account, why the Christian should endeavour for an established judgment in the truth, I shall content myself with three reasons. The first, taken from the damning nature of false doctrine; the second, from the subtlety of seducers to draw into false doctrine; and the third, from the universal influence that an established judgment hath on the whole man, and whole course of a Christian.

First, From the damning nature of false doctrines. They hunt for the precious life of souls, as well as any other sin. An imposthume in the head proves oft as deadly as one in the stomach. A corrupt judgment in foundation truth kills as sure as a rotten heart, indeed it proceeds thence. Jezebel's children are threatened to be killed with death, Rev. ii. 23; and who are her children, but her disciples, that drink of her cup of fornication, and embrace her corrupt doctrines? But sure this is not believed by some, who, though very strict in their lives, and seem as tender in matters of morality as Lot was of his guests, yet are very loose in their principles and judgments, exposing them, as he his daughters, to be defiled with any corrupt doctrine that comes to their door. They would make us think, that here men played but at small games, and their souls were not at stake, as in other sins. As if there were not such a question to be asked at the great day, what opinions we held, and whether we were sound in the faith? In a word, as if false doctrines were but an innocent thing, not like the wild gourd, which brought death into the prophet's pot, 2 Kings iv.; turning wholesome food, with which it was mingled, into baneful poison: but rather, like herb John in the pot, that does neither much good nor hurt. Yea, there be some that speak out, and tell us, a man may be saved in any religion, so he doth but follow his light; and are not these charitable men, who because they would have the company as few as may be that are damned,

Digitized by Google

make as many roads to heaven as the Scripture tells us there are ways to hell? Contrary to Christ, who tells us of no other way but by him to life: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' John xiv. 6. Point blank against St. John, who tells us but of one doctrine, and that the doctrine of Christ; and he that holds not this, to be marked out for a lost man, 2 John, ver. 9, 10: 'Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.' And how far, I pray, is that man off hell, that hath not God? He that hath not God before he dies, the devil shall have him when he dies. Well, sirs, the time is coming; yea, it hastens, (what favour and kindness soever corrupt doctrine find here at man's hand), wherein the obstinate heretic shall receive the same law at Christ's hands with the impenitent drunkard; you may see them both under the same condemnation, as they stand pinioned together for hell, Gal. v. 20, 21: 'I tell you now,' saith the apostle, 'as I have told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' And see, I pray you, if you cannot find the heretic's name amongst them: ignorance in fundamentals is damning, sure then error in fundamentals much more. If a pound weighs down the scale, there is no doubt then but a stone weight will do it. If the less sin presseth down to hell, how can we rationally think that the greater should escape it? Error stands at a farther distance from, yea, a fuller contrariety to truth, than ignorance. Error is ignorance with a dye on it. He that eats little or nothing, must needs die, much more he that eats rank poison. The apostle doth not only tell us of 'pernicious doctrines,' and 'damnable heresies,' but he tells us, they 'bring swift damnation' upon those that hold them, 2 Pet. ii. 1. I pray observe what an accent he lays on the damnation that comes by these corrupt doctrines; he calls it 'swift damnation.' All rivers find their way at last to the sea, from whence they sprang; but some return with a more swift stream, and get sooner to it than others. Would any make it a shorter voyage to hell than ordinary, let him throw himself but into this stream of corrupt doctrine, and he is not like to be long in going.

Secondly, Because imposters are so subtle, therefore it behoves the Christian to establish and strengthen his judgment in the truths of Christ. They are a generation of men, skilful to destroy the faith of others. There is an *erudita nequitia* in the world, as one calls it, a learned kind of wickedness, that some have to corrupt the minds of men. The Spirit of God sets them out to life, sometimes comparing them to merchants, who can set a gloss upon their false ware with fine words, 2 Pet. ii. 3; they are said with 'feigned words' to 'make merchandise' of souls. To hucksters, that blend and dash their wine with water, 2 Cor. ii. 17. To cheating gamesters, that have a sleight of hand to cog the die, Ephes. iv. 14. Yea, to witches themselves, Gal, iii. 1: 'Who hath bewitched you?' saith the apostle. Strange things have been done in our days, on those that God has suffered them to practise their sorcery upon; and what counter-charm better than an established judgment? It is observable that in 2 Tim. iii., where the apostle compares the seducers of that present age to those sorcerers, Jannes and Jambres, that resisted Moses, and shews what kind of persons they were that fell into their snare; 'such as though ever learning, yet never come to the knowledge of the truth,' ver. 7. Then he turns to Timothy, ver. 10: 'But thou hast fully known my doctrine.' As if he had said, I am out of fear for thee, thou art better grounded in the doctrine of the apostle than to be thus cheated of it. Indeed, those whom seducers lay in wait for, are chiefly weak, unsettled ones; for, as Solomon saith, 'In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird,' Prov. i. 17. The devil chose rather to assault Eve than Adam, as more likely of the two to be caught. And ever since he takes the same course; he labours to creep over where the hedge is lowest, and the resistance like to be weakest. Three characters you may observe of those who are most commonly seduced. First, they are called simple ones, Rom. xvi. 18: 'By good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.' Such who mean well, but want wisdom to discern those that mean ill; incautious ones, that dare pledge everybody, and drink of any one's cup, and never suspect poisoning. Secondly, 'children,' Eph. iv. 14: 'Be no more children, tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine.' Now, children they are very credulous, prone to believe every one that gives them a parcel of fair words; they think anything is good if it be sweet; it is not

Digitized by Google

hard to make them eat poison for sugar; they are not swayed by principles of their own, but by others; the child reads, construes, and learns his lesson as his master saith, and thinks it therefore right. Thus poor creatures that have little knowledge of the word themselves, they are easily persuaded this or that way, even as those of whom they have a good opinion please to lead them; let the doctrine be but sweet, and it goes down glib; they, like Isaac, bless their opinions by feeling, not by sight: hence many poor creatures applaud themselves so much of the joy they have found since they were of this judgment, and that way, not being able to try the comfort and sweetness they feel by the truth of their way from the word, they are fain to believe the truth of it by their feeling, and so, poor creatures, they bless error for truth. Thirdly, they are such as are unstable, 2 Pet. ii. 14: 'beguiling unstable souls,' such as are not well grounded and principled. The truth they profess hath no anchor-hold in their understanding, and so they are at the mercy of the wind, soon set adrift, and carried down the stream of those opinions which are the favourites of the present time, and are most cried up, even as the dead fish with the current of the tide.

Thirdly, We are to endeavour after an established judgment in the truth, because of the universal influence it hath upon the whole man. First, upon the memory, which is helped much by the understanding. The more weight is laid on the seal, the deeper impression is made on the wax. The memory is that faculty which carries the images of things. It holds fast what we receive, and is that treasury where we lay up what we desire afterwards to use and converse with. Now, the more clear and certain our knowledge of anything is, the deeper it sinks, and surer it is held by the memory. Secondly, upon the affections: truth is a light, the more steady and fixed the glass of the understanding is through which its beams are darted upon the affections, the sooner they take fire. 'Did not our hearts burn,' said the disciples, 'within us, while he opened to us the Scriptures?' Luke xxiv. 32. They had heard, no doubt, Christ preached much of what then he said before his passion, but never were they so satisfied and confirmed as now, when Scriptures and understanding were opened together, and this made their hearts burn. The sun in the firmament sends his influence where he doth not shed his beams, I mean, into the bowels of the earth; but the Sun of Righteousness imparts his influence only where his light comes; he spreads the beams of truth into the understanding to enlighten that; and while the creature sits under these wings, a kindly heart-quickening heat is begot in its bosom. Hence we find, even when the Spirit is promised as a comforter, he comes as a Convincer, John xvi. 13; he comforts by teaching. And certainly the reason why many poor trembling souls have so little heat of heavenly joy in their hearts, is because they have so little light to understand the nature and tenure of the gospel covenant. The further a soul stands from the light of truth, the further he must needs be from the heat of comfort. Thirdly an established judgment hath a powerful influence upon a life and conversation. The eye directs the foot; he walks very unsafely that sees not his way: and he uncomfortably, that is not resolved whether right or wrong. That which moves, must rest on something that does not move: a man could not walk if the earth turned under his feet. Now the principles we have in our understanding, are, as it were, the ground we go upon in all our actions; if they stagger and reel, much more will our life and practice. It is as impossible for a shaking hand to write a straight line, as an unfixed judgment to have an even conversation. The apostle joins steadfastness and unmovableness with 'abounding in the work of the Lord,' 1 Cor. xv. 58. And if I mistake not, he means chiefly in that place, steadfastness of judgment in that truth of the resurrection which some had been shaking; it is not the many notions we have, but the establishment we have in the truth, makes us strong Christians; as he is a strong man whose joints are well set together and knit, not, he who is spun out at length, but not thickened suitable to his height. One saith well, men are what they see and judge; though some do not fill up their light, yet none go beyond it. A truth under dispute in the understanding, is, as I may so say, stopped in the head: it cannot commence in the heart, or become practicable in the life: but when it passeth clearly there, and upon its comendation is embraced in the will and affections, then it is held fast, and

Digitized by Google

hath powerful effects in the conversation. The gospel, it is said, came to the Thessalonians in much 'assurance,' 1 Thess. i. 6; *i. e.* evidence of its truth; and see how prevalent and operative it was, ver. 6: 'Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Ghost.' They were assured that the doctrine was of God; and this carried them merrily through the saddest afflictions which attended the same.

Use 1. First, To reprove those, that instead of endeavouring to establish their judgments in the truth, make it their greatest study how to strengthen themselves in their errors. I am persuaded some men take more pains to furnish themselves with arguments to defend some one error they have taken up, than they do for the most saving truths in the Bible; yea, they could s oner die at a stake to defend one error they hold, than all the truths they profess. Austin saith of himself when he was a Manichæan, *Non tu eras, sed error meus erat Deus meus*: 'Thou, O Lord, were not, but my error was my god.' O, it is hard to reduce a person deeply engaged in the defence of an error; how oft had the Pharisees their mouths stopped by our Saviour, yet few or none reclaimed! Their spirits were too proud to recant. What, they lay down the bucklers, come down from Moses' chair, and confess what they might have taught the people for an oracle is now false! They will rather go on, and brave it out as well as they can, than come back with shame, though the shame was not to be ashamed of their error, but ashamed to confess it. The cynic answered smartly, who, coming out of a brothel house, was asked whether he was not ashamed to be seen coming out of such a naughty house, said, No, the shame was to go in, but honesty to come out. O, sirs, it is bad enough to fall into an error, but worse to persist. The first shews thee a weak man, *humanum est errare*; but the other makes thee too like the devil, who is to this day of the same mind he was at his first fall.

Use 2. Secondly, It reproves those who labour to unsettle the judgments of others, to ungird this belt about the Christian's loins. They come with the devil's question in their mouths, 'Yea, hath God said?' Are you sure this is a truth? Do not your ministers deceive you? Labouring slily to breed suspicions and jealousies in the hearts of Christians towards the truths they have received; such were they that trouble the Galatians, whom Paul wished 'cut off' for their pains, Gal. v. 12. They laboured to puzzle them, by starting scruples in their minds concerning the doctrine of the gospel. This is a cunning way at last to draw them from the faith, and therefore they are called 'subverters of the faith of others,' 2 Tim. ii. 14; Tit. i. 11. The house must needs be in danger, when the groundsels are loosened; can you think he means honestly, that undermines the foundation of your house? This they do, that would call in question the grand truths of the gospel: but this is a small fault in our loose age, or else so many seducers would not be suffered, whom I may call spiritual rogues and vagrants, to wander like gipsies up and down, bewitching poor simple souls to their perdition. O, it is sad, that he who steals the worth of two or three shillings should hold up his hand at the bar for his life, yea, sometimes hang for it; and that those who rob poor souls of the treasure of saving truths, and subvert the faith of whole families, should be let to lift up their heads with impudence, glorying in their impunity: that blasphemy against God should not bear an action, where blasphemy against the king is indicted for treason. It is well that God loves his truth better than men, or else these would escape in both worlds; but God hath declared himself against them. There is a day, when they who rob souls of truth shall be found and condemned as greater felons than they who rob houses of gold and silver. See how God lays their indictment, Jer. xxiii. 30: 'Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my word, every one from his neighbour.' He means the false prophets, that enticed the people from those truths which the faithful servants of God had delivered to them. There will be none on the bench to plead the blasphemer and seducer's cause, when God shall sit judge.

Use 3. Thirdly, This might well chastise the strange fickleness and unsettledness of judgment which many labour with in this unconstant age. Truths in many professors' minds are not as stars fixed in the heavens, but like meteors, that dance in the air; they are not as characters engraven in marble, but writ in the dust, which every wind and idle breath of seducers deface; many

Digitized by Google

entertain opinions, as some entertain suitors, not that they mean to marry them, but cast them off as soon as new ones come. Never was there a more giddy age than ours. What is said of fashion-mongers, that some men, should they see their pictures in that habit which they wore a few years past, would hardly know themselves in their present garb, it is most true in regard of their opinions; should many that have been great professors take a view of their religious principles a dozen years ago, and compare them with their present, they would be found not the same men. They have so chopped and changed, that they seem to have forsaken their old faith. Not that the old which they renounce was false, or the new which they espouse is true; but because they were either ignorant of the truth they first professed, or were insincere in the profession of it; and it is no wonder that the one should upon easy terms part with that, which he first took upon as weak grounds as now he leaves it; or that the other, who did not love or improve the truth he professed, should be given up of God to change it for an error. If the heathen, who did not glorify God with the light of nature they had, were righteously given up to a reprobate, injudicious mind to do that which was inconvenient, and morally absurd; then they who dishonour God with the revealed light of Scripture truth much more deserve that they should be given up to that which is spiritually wicked, even to believe lies and errors for truth. A heavy curse, did we rightly judge of it, to wander and wilder in a maze of error, and yet think they are walking in the way of truth.

Quest. But, may some say, How is it possible that ordinary professors should attain to this established judgment in the truth, when we see many of great parts and eminency much unsettled in their judgments?

Answ. We must distinguish, first, of persons; secondly, of truths. First, of persons; there are many eminent for parts, whose parts want piety to establish them, and no wonder to see wanton wits unfixed in the truths of God. None sooner topple over into error, than such who have not an honest heart to a nimble head. The richest soil, without culture, is most tainted with such weeds. They have been men of unsanctified parts, that have been the leaders in the way of error, though the more simple and weak that are led by them. They are knowing men, which first disgorge and vomit error from their corrupt hearts, and ignorant ones that lick it up. And therefore despair not of an established judgment so long as thou desirest to have an honest, upright heart, and conscientiously useth the means. The promise is on thy side, Psa. cxi. 10: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and a good understanding have they that do his commands.'

Secondly, We must distinguish of truths; some are fundamental, others are superstructory; now though many eminent for piety as well as parts are in the dark concerning some of the superstructory, and more circumstantial, because mysteriously laid down in the word, yet there is a sweet harmony among the godly in fundamentals. And in those, poor soul, thou mayest come by a faithful use of means to be established. As for our bodies, God hath so provided, that things necessary to preserve their life are more common, and to be had at a cheaper rate, than things for delicacy and state. So also for our souls. If bread were as hard to come by as sweetmeats, or water as scarce as wine, the greatest part of men must needs famish; so if truths necessary to salvation were as hard to be understood, and cleared from the Scriptures, as some others, many poor weak-hearted Christians would certainly perish without a miracle to help them. But the saving truths of the gospel lie plain, and run clear to all, but those who muddy the streams with their own corrupt minds.

CHAPTER III.

SOME DIRECTIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHING THE JUDGMENT OF PROFESSORS IN THE TRUTH.

Quest. BUT what counsel can you give me towards the establishing of my judgment in the truths of Christ?

Answ. 1. First, let thy aim be sincere in embracing of truths; a false, naughty heart, and an unsound judgment, like ice and water, are produced mutually by one another. The reason of the fickleness of some men's judgments proceeds

Digitized by Google

from the guile of their hearts. A stable mind and a double heart seldom meet. That place speaks full to this, 1 Tim. i. 5: 'The end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.' Now mark what follows, ver. 6: 'From which some having swerved,' or as it is in the original, not aiming at, 'having turned aside to vain jangling.' They never aimed at the power of holiness in receiving truth, that by it they might advance in their love, faith and other graces; and taking a wrong end and aim, no wonder they turn out of the right way. A naughty heart can easily bribe the judgment to vote on its side. This shall be truth now and no truth a month hence, if it please. That is truth with many, which serves their interest; they tie their judgments to their purse-strings, or preferments, &c., and such men are ready, with that weather-cock in Queen Mary's days, to sing a new song upon any change in their carnal concernments. When love receives a truth, it is held fast; but if lust after any worldly interest be the cause, then it may be packed away again, when the turn is served. Amnon was soon as sick of Tamar as ever he was for her. And have we not in our days seen some truths and ordinances kicked away with as much scorn and contempt as he did her, and by those that have been sufficiently fond of them, a few years past, but, to be feared, never truly in love with them?

Secondly, Attend on the ministry of the word. One great end of its appointment is to establish us in truth, Ephes. iv. 11: 'He gave some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints.' And mark, ver. 14, 'That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro,' &c. He that runs from his guide will be soon out of his way. It is no small testimony that God hath given to his faithful ministers in this present age; that few leave them but the leprosy of error appears soon on their forehead. And in thy waiting on the ministry of the word, be sure thou attendest to the doctrinal part of the sermon as well as to the applicatory. The former is necessary to make thee a solid Christian, as the other to make thee a warm Christian: indeed, hot affections, without solid knowledge, are but like fire in the pan when the piece is not charged. The Levites, Nehem. viii. 7, 8, we find, 'gave the sentence of the law, and caused the people to understand it.' Planting goes before watering, and so should teaching before exhorting. And the same method people should learn in, that we are to preach in.

Thirdly, Enslave not thy judgment to any person or party. There is a spiritual suretyship hath undone many in their judgments and principles: be not bound to, or for, the judgment of any. Weigh truth, and tell gold, thou mayest after thy father: thou must live by thy own faith, not another's. Labour to see truth with thine own eyes. That building stands weak, which is held up by a shore or some neighbour's house it leans on, rather than on any foundation of its own; when these go, that will fall to the ground also: let not authority from man, but evidence from the word, conclude thy judgment; that is but a shore, this a foundation. Quote the Scripture rather than men for thy judgment. Not, so saith such a learned holy man, but, Thus saith the holy Scripture; yet take heed of bending this direction too far the other way, which is done when we condemn the judgment of such, whose piety and learning might command reverence: there is sure a mean to be found betwixt defying men and deifying them. It is admiring of persons that is the traitor to truth, and makes many cry 'Hosanna' to error, and 'Crucify' to truth. Eusebius, out of Josephus, tells us of Herod (that Herod whom we read, Acts xii., to be eaten up of worms) his coming upon the theatre gorgeously clad, and that while he was making an eloquent oration to the people, his silver robe, which he then wore, did, by the reflex of the sunbeams shining on it, so glister, as dazzled the eyes of the spectators; and this, saith he, occasioned some flatterers to cry out, 'The voice of God, and not of man.' And truly the glistering varnish which some men's parts and rhetoric put upon their discourses does oft so blind the judgments of their admirers, that they are too prone to think all divine they speak; especially if they be such, whom God hath used as instruments for any good to their souls formerly. O it is hard then, as he said, *amare hominem humaniter*, to love and esteem man as man, to reverence such so as not to be in danger of loving their errors also. Augustine had been a means to convert Alypius from one error, and he confesseth this was an occasion, why he was so easily by him led into another error,

Digitized by Google

no less than Manicheeism: Alypius thought he could not pervert him here, that had converted him; call therefore none father on earth; despise none, adore none.

Fourthly, Beware of curiosity. He is half gone into error that vainly covets novelties, and listens after every new-fangled opinion. We read of itching ears, 2 Tim. iv. 3: this itch commonly ends in a scab of error. Tamar lost her chastity by gadding; *castitas mentis est fides incorrupta;* the chastity of the mind is its soundness in the faith. And this they are in danger to lose, who will go into all companies, and lend an ear to all doctrines that are preached. First, be a hearer, and then a disciple of them. Many indulge themselves so far in this curiosity of conversing with every sect and opinion, that at last they turn sceptics, and can settle upon nothing as truth. Agustine confesseth of himself that he had gone through so many errors and delusions of the Manichees, (which he once cried up for truths, but afterwards saw them abominable errors,) that at last he was afraid of truth itself, which he heard Ambrose preach. *Ut malum medicum expertus, etiam bono timeat see committere.* 'As,' saith he, 'one that hath had experience of an unskilful physician, is at last afraid to put himself in the hands of him that is skilful.' O take heed that you who will now hear anything come not in the end that you will believe nothing!

Fifthly, Humbly beg an established judgment of God. No travellers lose their way sooner than they who think they know it so well, as they need not ask it. And no professors are in such danger of being drawn from the truth as they who lean to their own understanding, and acknowledge not God in their way, by consulting with himself daily. Mark, pride, however it may seem to soar, hath such a mercy in store for them, they may, with Nebuchadnezzar, 'bless the Most High,' and acknowledge him at their return, whom they neglected so unworthily at their setting forth. O take heed therefore of pride, which will soon make thee a stranger at the throne of grace! Pride takes little delight in begging; it turns humble praying for truth into a busy, stickling, and ambitious disputing about truth; there is honour to be got here; and thus many, to get victory, have lost truth in the heat of the battle. Lay this deep in thy heart, that God, which gives an eye to see truth, must give a hand to hold it fast when we have it. What we have from God we cannot keep without God; keep therefore thy acquaintance with God, or else truth will not keep her acquaintance long with thee. God is light; thou art going into the dark, as soon as thou turnest thy back upon him. We stand at better advantage to find truth, and keep it also, when devoutly praying for it, than fiercely wrangling and contending about it; disputes toil the soul, and raise the dust of passion; prayer sweetly composeth the mind, and lays the passions which disputes draw forth; and I am sure a man may see further in a still, clear day, than in a windy and cloudy. When a person talks much, and rests little, we have great cause to fear his brain will not long hold; and truly, when a person shall be much in talking and disputing about truth, without a humble spirit in prayer to be led into it, God may justly punish that man's pride with a spiritual frenzy in his mind, that he shall not know error from truth.

Sixthly, Look thou takest not offence at the difference of judgments and opinions that are found amongst the professors of religion. It is a stone which the papist throws, in these divided times especially, before our feet. How know you, saith he, which is truth, when there are so many judgments and ways amongst you? Some have so stumbled at this, that they have quitted the truth they once professed, and by the storm of dissensions in matters of religion have been, if not thrown upon the rock of atheism, yet driven to and fro in a fluctuation of mind, not willing to cast anchor anywhere in their judgment till they see this tempest over, and those that are scattered from one another by diversity of judgment, meet together in an unity and joint consent of persuasions in matters of religion. A resolution, as one saith very well, as foolish and pernicious to the soul, if not more than it would be to the body, if a man should vow he would not eat till all the clocks in the city should strike twelve all together; the latter might sooner be expected than the former.

Seventhly, Rest not till thou feelest the efficacy of every truth thou holdest in thy judgment upon thy heart; one faculty helps another. The more clear truth is in the understanding, the more abiding in the memory; and the more operative

Digitized by Google

truth is on the will, the more fixed in the judgment. Let a thing be never so excellent, yet if a man can make little or no use thereof, it is little worth to him, and may easily be got from him. Thus many rare libraries have been parted with by rude soldiers, into whose hands they have fallen, for little more than their covers were worth, which would by some, that could have improved them, have been kept as the richest prize. And verily it fares with truth according as they are into whose hands it falls; if it lights upon one that falls to work with it and draws out the strength and sweetness of it, this man holds it so much faster in his judgment by how much more operative it is on his heart; but if it meets with one that finds no divine efficacy it hath to humble, comfort, sanctify him, it may soon be turned out of doors, and put to seek for a new host; such may for a time dance about that light, which a while after themselves will blow out. When I hear of a man that once held original sin and the universal pollution of man's nature to be a truth, but now denies it, I cannot but fear he did either never lay it so close his heart as to abase and humble himself kindly for it; or that he grew weary of the work, and by sloth and negligence lost the efficacy of that truth in his heart before he lost the truth itself in his judgment. I might instance in many other particulars, wherein professors in these testing times have slid from their old principles. Singing of psalms hath been a duty owned and practised by many who now have laid it down, and it were a question worth the asking of them, whether formerly they never enjoyed sweet communion with God in that duty as well as others? Whether their hearts did never dance and leap up to God with heavenly affections while they sung with their lips? And verily I should think it strange to hear a godly person deny this. Well, if ever thou didst, Christian, meet with God at this door of the tabernacle, for I cannot yet think it otherwise, let me ask thee again whether thy heart did not grow common, cold, and formally in the duty before thou durst cast off the duty? 1 John ii. 23, 24. And if so, which I am very ready to believe, I desire such in the fear of God to consider these four questions.

First, Whether they may not fear that they are in an error; and that this darkness is befallen their judgments as a punishment for their negligence and slightness of spirit in performing the duty, when they did not question the lawfulness of it?

Secondly, Whether it were not better they laboured to recover the first liveliness of their affections in the duty, which would soon bring them again acquainted with that sweetness and joy they of old found in it, than to cast it off upon so weak evidence as they who can say most bring in against it?

Thirdly, Whether such as neglect one duty are likely to thrive by any other, and keep up the savour of them fresh in their souls?

Fourthly, Whether if God should suffer them to decline in their affections to other ordinance, which he forbid, if it be his will, it were not as easy for Satan to gather together arguments enough to make them scruple, and in time cast off that also as well as this? And that there is reason for such a question these times will tell us; wherein every ordinance hath had its turn to be questioned, yea, disowned, some by one, some by another; one will not sing; another will not have his child baptised; a third will not have any water baptism, nor supper neither; a fourth bungs up his ear too from all hearing of the word, and would have us expect an immediate teaching. Thus, when once ordinances and truths become dead to us, through our miscarriage under them, we can be willing, how beautiful soever they were once in our eye, yea, call to have them buried out of our sight. These things sadly laid to heart, will give you reason to think, though this direction be placed last in order of my discourse, yet it should not find neither the last nor the least place, among all the other named, in your Christian care and practise.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEREIN IS CONTAINED THE SECOND WAY OF HAVING OUR LOINS GIRT WITH TRUTH, VIZ., SO AS TO MAKE A FREE AND BOLD PROFESSION OF IT, AND WHY THIS IS OUR DUTY: AND A SHORT EXHORTATION TO IT.

The second way that truth is assaulted is by force and violence; the devil pierceth the fox's skin of seducers with the lion's skin of persecutors. The bloodiest tragedies

Digitized by Google

in the world have been acted on the stage of the church; and the most inhuman massacres and butcheries committed on the harmless sheep of Christ. The first man that was slain in the world was a saint, and he for religion. And as Luther said, Cain will kill Abel unto the end of the world. The fire of persecution can never go out quite, so long as there remains a spark of hatred in the wicked's bosom on earth, or a devil in hell to blow it up. Therefore there is a second way of having truth girt about the Christian's loins, as necessary as the other; and that is, in the profession of it. Many that could never be beaten from the truth by dint of argument, have been forced from it by fire of persecution. It is not an orthodox judgment will enable a man to suffer for the truth at the stake. Then that poor Smith, in our English Martyrology, would not have sent such a dastard-like answer to his friend, ready to suffer for that truth, which he himself had been a means to instruct him in,—that indeed it was the truth, but he could not burn. Truth in the head, without holy courage, makes a man like the sword-fish, which Plutarch saith, hath a sword in the head, but no heart to use it. Then a person becomes unconquerable, when from heaven he is endued with a holy boldness, to draw forth the sword of the Spirit, and own the naked truth, by a free profession of it in the face of death and danger. This, this is to 'have our loins girt about with truth.' So that the note, from this second kind of girding with truth, is,

Doct. That it is the saints' duty, and should be their care, not only to get an established judgment in the truth, but also to maintain a stedfast profession of the truth. This the apostle presseth, Heb. x. 23: 'Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.' He speaks it in opposition to those who, in those hazardous times, declined the assemblies of the saints, for fear of persecution; he calls it a 'wavering.' And he that staggers is next door to apostasy. We must not spread our sails of profession in a calm, and furl them up when the wind riseth. Pergamos is commended, Rev. ii. 13, for her bold profession: 'I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan hath his throne; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you.' It was a place where Satan sat in the magistrate's seat, where it was *grande satis piaculum mortem mer eri, Christianum esse;* matter enough to deserve death to be a Christian; yea, some blood now was shed before their eyes; and even in those days they denied not the truth. This God took kindly. It is a strict charge Paul gives Timothy, 1 Epis. vi. 11: 'But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness,' &c.; while others are prowling for the world, lay about thee for spiritual riches, pursue this with as hot a chase as they do their temporal. But, what if this trade cannot be peaceably driven? Must shop windows then be shut up, profession laid aside, and he stay to be religious, till more favourable times come about? No such matter; ver. 12, he bids him 'fight the good fight of faith;' do not basely quit thy profession, but lay life and all to stake to keep this. And that he might engage him beyond a retreat, see ver. 13: 'I charge thee in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession, that thou keep this commandment;' as if he had said, If ever you will see the face of Christ with comfort at the resurrection, who chose to lose his life, rather than deny or dissemble the truth, stand to it, and flinch not from your colours. Augustine, in his *Confess.* lib. viii. cap. 2, hath a notable story of one Victorinus, famous in Rome for rhetoric, which he taught the senators. This man, in his old age, was converted to Christianity, and came to Simplicianus, one eminent at that time for his piety, whispering in his ears softly these words, *Ego sum Christianus;* 'I am a Christian;' but this holy man answered, *Non credo, nec deputabo te, inter Christianos nisi in ecclesia Christi te videro;* 'I will not believe it, nor count thee so, till I see thee among the Christians in the church;' at which he laughed, saying, *Ergone parietes faciunt Christianum;* 'Do then those walls make a Christian? cannot I be such, except I openly profess it, and let the world know the same?' This he said for fear, being yet but a young convert, though an old man; but a while after, when he was more confirmed in the faith, and seriously considered, that if he should continue thus ashamed of Christ, he would be ashamed of him when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, he changed his note, and came

Digitized by Google

to Simplicianus, saying, *Ramus in ecclesiam, Christianus volo fieri;* 'Let us go to the church, I will now in earnest be a Christian.' And there, though a private profession of his faith might have been accepted, chose to do it openly, saying, That he had openly professed rhetoric, which was not a matter of salvation, and should he be afraid to own the word of God in the congregation of the faithful? God requires both the religion of the heart and mouth, Rom. x. 10; 'With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' Confession of the mouth, without faith in the heart, is gross hypocrisy; to pretend faith without profession of the mouth, is both hypocrisy and cowardice.

Reas. I shall give but one reason of the point, and that is taken from the great trust which God puts in his saints, concerning his truth; this is the great *depositum* which God delivers to his saints, with a strict and solemn charge to keep against all that undermine or oppose it. Some things we trust God with; some things God trusts us with. The great thing which we put into God's hand to be kept for us, is our soul, 2 Tim. i. 12: 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.' That which God trusts us chiefly with, is his truth. It is therefore said to be delivered to them, as a charge of money to a friend whom we confide in, Jude 3: 'Contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.' 'To them,' saith the apostle, speaking of the Jews, 'were committed the oracles of God,' Rom. iii. 2. They were concredited with that heavenly treasure. So Paul exhorts Timothy, Eph. i. 1, to 'hold fast the form of sound words;' and this, ver. 14, he calls 'the good thing which was committed to him.' If he that is intrusted with the keeping of a king's crown and jewels, ought to look carefully to his charge, that none be lost or stolen; much more the Christian, that hath in his charge God's crown and treasure. Rob God of his truth, and what hath he left? The word of truth is that testimony which the great God gives of himself to man. The saints are his chosen witnesses above others, whom he calls forth to vouch his truth, by a free and holy profession thereof before men, called therefore the witnesses of God, Psa. xix. 7; Isa. viii. 20; Heb. xii. 1; Rev. xi. 3. He that maintains any error from the word, bears false witness against God. He that for fear of shame deserts the truth, or dissembles his profession, he denies God his testimony; and who can express what a bloody sin this is, and to what a high contempt of God it amounts? It were a horrid crime though but in a man's case. As when one is falsely accused in a court, to speak something that might clear the innocency of the man, and yet should suffer him to be condemned, rather than hazard himself a little by speaking the truth in open court. O what then is his sin, that when God himself, in his truth, stands at sorry man's bar, dares not speak for God, when called in to declare himself; but lets truth suffer by an unjust sentence, that himself may not at man's hands for bearing witness to it?

Object. But this may seem too heavy a burden to lay on the Christian's back. Must we lay all at stake, and hazard all that is dear to us, rather than deny, or dissemble our profession of the truth? Sure Christ will have but few followers if he holds his servants to such hard terms.

Answ. Indeed it is hard to flesh and blood; one of the highest stiles to be gone over in our way to heaven: a carnal heart cannot hear this, but he is offended presently, Matt. xiii. 21. Therefore such as are loth to lose heaven, and yet unwilling to venture thus much for it, have set their wits at work to find out an easier way thither. Hence those heretics of old, Priscillianists, and others, whose chief religion was to save their own skin, made little of outward profession. They thought they might say and unsay, swear and forswear, (according to their wretched principle, *Juro, perjuro, mentem injuratam gero*), so in their heart they did but cleave to the truth. O what fools were the prophets, apostles, and other holy martyrs, that have sealed the truth with their blood, if there might have been such a fair way of escaping the storm of persecution! Bold men, that to save a little trouble from man, for truth's sake, durst invent such detestable blasphemies against the truth; yea, deface those characters which nature itself engraves upon the conscience. The same window that let in the light of a Deity, would with it let in this also, that we should walk in the name of this God: the very heathen know this. 'All people will walk, every one in the name of his god,' Micah iv., Socrates, to blood, held

Digitized by Google

there was but one God; and in his apology for his life, said, if they would give him his life on condition to keep this truth to himself, and not teach it to others, he would not accept it: behold here the powerful workings of a natural conscience! Have not they then improved the knowledge of the Scripture well, in the meantime, that are so far outshot from nature's weak bow? Religion would soon vanish into an empty nothing, if for fear of every one we meet we must, like runaway soldiers, pluck off our colours, and put our profession, as it were, in our pockets, lest we should be known to whom we belong. What doth God require by a free profession of his truth, more than a master doth of his servant, when he bids him take his livery, and follow him in the streets? or when a prince calls his subjects into the field, to declare their loyalty by owning his quarrel against an invading enemy? And is it reasonable what man requires of these, and only hard from God's hands? Nay, it is not more, not so much, as we desire of God for ourselves. Who would not have God make profession of his love to us, and bear witness for us against Satan, and our own sins, at that great day when men and angels shall be spectators? And shall we expect that from God which he owes us by no law, but of his own free promise, and deny him that which we are under so many bonds to pay? If it be but in some affliction, while we are here, how disconsolate are we, if God's face be a little overcast, and he doth not own us in our distress? And is there no kindness to be shewn to that God that knows your soul in adversity? When the truth is in an agony, may not Christ look, that all his friends should sit up and watch with it? Oh! it were shame with a witness, that any such effeminate delicacy should be found among Christ's servants, that they cannot break a little of their worldly rest and enjoyments to attend on him and his truth.

Use. Let this stir us up to get the girdle of truth close girt to us, that we may be able to hold fast the profession of it, even in the face of death and danger, and not be offended when persecution ariseth. Blessed be God, it is not yet come to that; we have the truth at a cheaper rate; but how soon the market may rise we know not. Truth is not always to be had at the same price. Buy it we must at any, but sell it upon no terms. And let me tell you, there hath, is, and will be a spirit of persecution in the hearts of the wicked, to the end of the world; and as Satan was considering Job, before he laid his foul hands on him, so now persecution is working in the spirits of the ungodly; there are engines of death continually preparing in the thoughts and desires of Satan and his instruments, against the sincere professors of the truth; it is already resolved upon what they would do, might power be given, and opportunity, to put their malice in execution; yea, we are half-way already towards a persecution. Satan comes first with a spirit of error, and then of persecution; he first corrupts men's minds with error, and then enrageth their hearts with wrath against the professors of truth. It is impossible that error, being a child of hell, should be peaceable; it would not then be like its father. That which is from beneath can neither be pure nor peaceable. And how far God hath suffered this sulphureous spirit of error to prevail, is so notorious, that no apology is broad enough to cover the nakedness of these unhappy times. It is therefore high time to have our girdle of truth on, yea, close girt about us in the profession of it. Not every one that now applauds truth will follow it, when once it comes to shew them the way to prison; not every one that preacheth for it, or disputes for it, will suffer for it. Arguments are harmless things, blunt weapons, they fetch no blood; but when we suffer, then we are called to try it with truth's enemies at sharps. This requires something more than a nimble tongue, a sharp wit, and a logical head: where then will be the wise, the disputer, the men of parts and gifts! Alas! they will, like cowardly soldiers, be wanting in the fight, though they could be as forward as the best at a muster or training, when no enemy was in the field; when to appear for truth was rather a matter of gain or applause, than loss and hazard. No, God hath chosen the foolish to confound the wise in this piece of service; the humble Christian by his faith, patience, and love to the truth, to shame men of high parts, and no grace.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

A DIRECTION OR TWO FOR THE GIRDING OF TRUTH CLOSE TO US IN THE PROFESSION OF IT.

Quest. But how may a soul get to be thus girt with truth in the profession of it?

Answ. First labour to get a heart inflamed with a sincere love to the truth; this is only able to match the enemies of truth. The worst they can do is bonds or death, and 'love is stronger than death;' it kills the very heart of death itself, it makes all easy. Commandments are not grievous to love, nor doth it complain of sufferings. With what a light heart did Jacob, for the love of Rachel, endure the heat of the day, and cold of the night. It is venturous. Jonathan threw a kingdom at his heels, and conflicted with the anger of an enraged father, for David's sake. Love never thinks itself a loser, so long as it keeps its beloved; yea, it is ambitious of any hazardous enterprise, whereby it may sacrifice itself in the service of its beloved, as we see in David, who put his life in his hands for Michal; how much more, when our love is pitched upon so transcendant an object as Christ and his truth! alas, they are but faint spirits, which are breathed from a creature; weak beams that are shot from such sorry beauties. If these lay their lovers under such a law, that they cannot but obey, though with the greatest peril and hazard; what constraint then must a soul ravished with the love of Christ be under? This has made the saints leap out of their estates, relations, yea, out of their bodies with joy, counting it not their loss to part with them, but to keep them with the least prejudice to the truth; Rev. xii. 11, it is said there, 'They loved not their lives unto the death.' Mark, not to the loss of some of the comforts of their lives, but 'to death;' life itself they counted an enemy, when it would part them and truth; as a man doth not love his arm or leg, when it hazards the rest, but bids cut it off. Cannot we live, say these noble spirits, but to the clouding of truth, and calling our love to it and Christ into question? Welcome then the worst of deaths. This kept up David's courage when his life was laid for, Psa. cxix. 95: 'The wicked have waited for me to destroy me, but I will consider thy testimonies.' A carnal heart would have considered his estate, wife, and children, or at least his life, now in danger; but David's heart was on a better subject, he considered the testimonies of God, and so much sweetness pours in upon his soul, while he is rolling them in his meditation, that he cannot hold: 'O how I love thy law!' ver. 97. This made him set light by all the troubles he met with for his cleaving to the truth. It is a great mystery to the world, that men for an opinion, as they call it, should run such desperate hazard. Therefore, Paul was thought by his judge to be out of his wits. And that question which Pilate asked Christ, seems rather to be slightingly, than seriously spoken, John xviii. Our Saviour had told him, ver. 37, that the end why he was born, and came into the world, was, that he should 'bear witness to the truth.' Then Pilate, ver. 38, asks Christ, 'What is truth?' and presently flings away, as if he had said, Is this now a time to think of truth, when thy life is in danger? What is truth, that thou shouldst venture so much for it? But a gracious soul may better ask in a holy scorn, What are riches and honours? What the fading pleasures of this cheating world? Yea, what is life itself, that any, or all of these, should be set in opposition to truth? O sirs, look what has your love, that will command purse, credit, life, and all. *Amor meus pondus meum*, every man goes where his love carries him. If the world has your love, on it you will spend your lives; if truth has your hearts, you will catch the blow that is made at it in your own breasts, rather than let it fall on it. Only be careful that your love to truth be sincere, or else it will leave you at the prison door, and make you part with truth, when you should most appear for it. Three sorts of pretenders to truth, their love is not like to endure the fiery trial.

First, Such as embrace truth for carnal advantage. Sometimes truth pays well for her board in the world's own coin, and so long every one will invite her to his house. These do not love truth, but the jewel at her ear. Many were observed in Henry the Eighth's time to be very zealous against abbots, that

Digitized by Google

loved their lands more than they hated their idolatry. Truth finds few that love her *gratis*. And those few only will suffer with truth, and for it; as for the other, when the worldly dowry that truth brought be once spent, you will find they are weary of their match. This kitchen fire burns no longer than such gross fuel of profit, credit, and the like does feed it. If you cannot love naked truth, you will not have courage to go naked for truth. If you cannot love disgraced truth, you will not endure to be disgraced for truth; and what usage truth finds, that her followers must expect.

Secondly, Such who commend truth, and cry it up highly; but if you mark them, they do but compliment with it; all this while they keep at a distance, and do not suffer truth to come within them, so as to give law unto them. Like one that entertains a suitor, speaks well of him, holds discourse with him, but will not hear of marrying him. Bucholcerus would oft say, *Multi osculantur Christum, pauci vero amant;* 'Many kiss Christ, but few love him.' True love to Christ is conjugal; when a soul delivers up itself from an inward liking it hath to Christ, as to her husband, to be ruled by his spirit, and ordered by his word of truth, here is a soul loves Christ and his truth; but where truth has no command, and bears no rule, there dwells no love to truth in that heart. She that is not obedient, cannot be a loving wife, because love would constrain her to be so; and so would love in the soul enforce obedience to the truth it loves. Nay, he that doth not obey truth, is so far from loving it, that he is afraid of truth; and he that is slavishly afraid of truth, will sooner prove a persecutor of truth, than a sufferer for truth. So true is that of Hierome, *Quem metuit quis odit, quem odit, perisse cupit;* 'Whom we fear, we hate; whom we hate, we wish they were destroyed.' Saul feared David, and that made him industriously seek his ruin. Herod feared John, and that cost him his life. Slavish fear makes the naughty heart imprison truth in his conscience, because if that had its liberty and authority in the soul, it would imprison, yea, execute every lust that now rules the roast; and he that imprisons truth in his own bosom, will hardly lie in prison himself as a witness for truth.

Thirdly, Such as have no zeal against truth's enemies. Love goes ever armed with zeal, this is her dagger she draws against all the opposers of truth. *Qui non zelat, non ama.:* 'He that is not zealous, doth not love.' Now right zeal acts, like fire, to its utmost power, yet ever keeping its place and sphere. If it be confined to the breast of a private Christian, whence it may not flame forth in punishing truth's enemies, then it burns inwardly the more for being pent up; and preys, like a fire in his bones, upon the Christian's own spirits, consuming them, yea, eating him up for grief, to see truth trod under foot of error or profaneness, and he not able to help it up. It is no joy to a zealous lover to outlive his beloved; such there have been, who could have chose rather to have leaped into their friends' grave, and lain down with them in the dust, that here pass a disconsolate life without them. 'Let us go and die with him,' said Thomas, when Christ told them Lazarus was dead; and I am sure zealous lovers of truth count it as melancholy living in evil times, when that is fallen in the streets. The news of the ark's taking frightened good Eli's soul out of his body; and this may charitably be thought to have given life to Elijah's wish, yea, solemn prayer for death, 1 Kings xix. 4: 'It is enough, take away my life;' the holy man saw how things went among the great ones of those wicked times; idolaters they were courted, and the faithful servants of God carted, as, I may so say, yea, killed; and now this zealous prophet thinks it a good time to leave the world in, rather than live in torment any longer, to see the name, truth, and servants of God trampled on by those who should have shewn most kindness to them. But if zeal hath any power put into her hands, wherein she may vindicate truth's cause, as when she is exalted into the magistrate's seat, then truth's enemies shall know and feel, that 'she bears not the sword in vain.' The zealous magistrate will have, as an arm to relieve and defend truth, 'the Israelite;' so a hand to smite blasphemy, error, and profaneness, 'the Egyptian,' when any of them assault her. O how Moses laid about him, that meek man, who stood so mute in his own cause, Numb. xii., when the people had committed idolatry! His heart was so inflamed within him, that, as well as he loved them, he could neither open his

Digitized by Google

mouth in a prayer for them to God, nor his ear to receive any petition from them, till he had given vent to his zeal in an act of justice upon the offenders. Now such, and such only, are the persons that are likely, when called, to suffer for the truth, who will not let it suffer if they can help it. But as for natural, Gallio-like spirits, that can see truth and error scuffling, and not do their utmost to relieve truth, by interposing their power and authority, if a magistrate; by preaching the one up, and the other down, if a minister; and by a free testimony to, fervent prayer for, and affectionate sympathzing with truth, as it fares ill or well, if a private Christian; I say, as for such, who stand in this case as some spectators about two wrestlers, not caring much who hath the fall, these are not the men that can be expected to expose themselves to much suffering for truth. That magistrate who hath not zeal enough to stop the mouths of truth's enemies when he may, will he open his mouth in a free profession of it when death and danger face him? That minister who hath neither love nor courage enough to apologize for truth in the pulpit, can it be thought he would stand to her defence at a stake? In a word that private Christian whose heart is not wounded through truth's sides so as to sympathize with it, will he interpose himself betwixt truth and the blow that bloody persecutors make at it, and choose to receive it into his own body, though to death, rather than it should light on truth? If the fire of love within be out, or so little that it will not melt the man into sorrow for the wrongs done to truth by men of corrupt minds, where will the flame be found that should enable him to burn to ashes under the hand of bloody men? He will never endure the fire in his body, that hath no more care to keep that sacred fire burning in his soul; if he cannot shed tears, much less will he bleed for truth.

Quest. If any now should ask, how they may get their hearts inflamed with this heavenly fire of love to truth, I answer, First,

Ans. 1. Labour for an inward conformity of thy heart to truth. Likeness is the ground of love. A carnal heart cannot like truth, because it is not like to truth. Such a one may love truth, as he did Alexander. *Regem non Alexandrum;* 'the king not the person that was king:' truth in its honour and dignity, when it can prefer him, but not naked truth itself. How is it possible an earthly soul should love truth that is heavenly? An unholy heart, truth that is pure? O it is sad indeed, when men's tenets and principles in their understandings do clash, and fight with the principles of their hearts and affections! When men have orthodox judgment, and heterodx hearts, there must needs be little love to truth, because the judgment and will are so unequally yoked; truth in the conscience reproving and threatening lust in the heart, and that again controlling truth in the conscience. Thus, like a scolding couple, they may a while dwell together; but taking no content in one another, the wretch is easily persuaded to give truth a bill of divorce at last, and send her away, as Ahasuerus did Vashti, that he may espouse other principles, which will suit better with his corrupt heart, and not cross him in the way he is in. This, this I am persuaded hath parted many and truth in these licentious days. They could not sin peaceably while they kept their judgments sound; truth ever and anon would be chiding them; and therefore, to match their judgments with their hearts, they have taken up principles suitable to their lusts. But, soul, if truth had such a power upon thee, to transform thee by the renewing of thy mind into its own likeness, that as the scion turns the stock into its own nature, so truth hath assimilated thee, and made thee bear fruit like itself, thou art the person that will never part with truth; before thou canst do this, thou must part with that new nature, which by it the Spirit of God hath begot in thee. There is now such a near union betwixt thee and truth, or rather thee and Christ, as can never be broke. We see what a mighty power there goes along with God's ordinance of marriage, that two persons, who possibly a month before never knew one another, yet their affections once knit by love, and their persons made one by marriage, they can now leave friends and parents for to enjoy each other; such a mighty power, and much greater, goes along with this mystical marriage between the soul and Christ, the soul and truth, that the same person, who, before conversion, would not have ventured the loss of a penny for Christ, or his truth, yet now, knit to Christ and his truth by a secret work of

Digitized by Google

the Spirit new forming him into the likeness thereof, he can bid adieu to the world, life, and all, for these. As that martyr told him that asked whether he did not love his wife and children, and was not loth to part with them, 'Yes,' saith he, 'I love them so dearly, that I would not part with any of them for all that the Duke of Brunswick is worth,' whose subject he was;' but for Christ's sake and his truth, farewell to them all.'

Secondly, Labour to get thy heart more and more infired with the love of God and this will work in thee a dear love to his truth: love observes what is precious and dear to its beloved, and loves it for his sake. David's love to Jonathan made him inquire for some of his race, that he might shew kindness to, for his sake. Love to God will make the soul inquisitive to find out what is near and dear to God, that by shewing kindness to it he may express his love to him. Now upon a little search, we shall find that the great God sets a very high price upon the head of truth, Ps. cxxxviii. 2: 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name;' that is, God's name by which he is known; every creature hath God's name upon it; by it God is known, even to the least pile of grass; but to his word and truth therein written he hath given pre-eminence above all other things that bear his name. Take a few considerations whereby we may a little conceive of the high value God sets of truth. First, God when he vouchsafeth his word and truth to a people, he makes account he gives them one of the greatest mercies they can receive or he give; he calls them the great things of his law,' Hos viii. 12. A people that enjoy his truth, they are by Christ's own judgment 'lifted up to heaven;' whatever people have at God's hands, without this, bears no more comparison with it than Hagar's loaf of bread and bottle, which was Ishmael's portion, would with Isaac's inheritance. God that knows how to prize and rate his own gifts, saith of his word which he 'sheweth to Jacob, and testimonies that he gives to Israel,' that 'he hath not dealt so with any nation,' Psa. cxlvii. 20; that is, not so richly and graciously. Secondly, consider God's especial care to preserve his truth: whatever is lost, God looks to his truth. In shipwrecks at sea, and scarefices at land, when men can save but little, they use to choose not lumber, and things of no worth, but what they esteem most precious. In all the great revolutions, changes, and overturning of kingdoms, and churches also, God hath still preserved his truth. Thousands of saints' lives have been taken away, but that which the devil spites more than all the saints, yea, which alone he spites them for, that is, the truth, this lives, and shall, to triumph over his malice; and sure if truth were not very dear to God, he would not be at this cost to keep it with the blood of his saints; yea, which is more, the blood of his Son, whose errand into the world was by life and death 'to bear witness to the truth,' John xviii. 37. In a word, in that great and dismal conflagration of heaven and earth, when the elements shall melt for heat, and the world come to its fatal period, then truth shall not suffer the least loss, but 'the word of the Lord endureth for ever,' 1 Pet. i. 25. Thirdly, Consider the severity of God to the enemies of truth. A dreadful curse is denounced against those that shall 'take away from it, or add the least to it,' that embase or clip this heavenly coin, Rev. xxii. 18. All these speak at what a high rate God values truth; and no wonder, if we consider what truth is, that truth which shines forth from the written word: it is the extract of God's thoughts and counsels, which from everlasting he took up, and had in his heart to effect. Nothing comes to pass but as an accomplishment of this his word; it is the most full and perfect representation that God himself could give of his own being and nature to the sons of men, that by it we might know him, and love him. Great princes use to send their pictures by their ambassadors to those whom they woo for marriage. God is such an infinite perfection, that no hand can draw him forth to life but his own, and this he hath done exactly in his word, from which all his saints have come to be enamoured with him. As we deal with truth, so we do with God himself; he that despiseth that, despiseth him. He that abandons the truth of God, renounceth the God of truth. Though man cannot come to pull God out of his throne, and deprive him of his Godhead, yet they come as near this as it is possible, when they let out their wrath against the truth; in this they do, as it were, execute God in effigy. There is reason, we see, why God should so highly prize his truth, and that we that love him should cleave to it.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, Be much in the meditation of the transcendent excellency of truth. The eye affects the heart; this is the window at which love enters. Never any that had a spiritual eye to see truth in her native beauty, but had a heart to love her. This was the way that David's heart was ravished with the love of the word of truth, Psa. cxix. 96: 'O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day;' while his thoughts were on it, his love was drawn to it. David found a great difference betwixt meditating on the truths of God's word, and other excellences which the world cries up so highly: when he goes to entertain himself with the thoughts of some perfection in the creature, he finds it but a *jejune*, dry subject, compared with this: he soon tumbles over the book of the world's excellences, and can find no notion that deserves any long stay upon it: 'I have seen,' saith he, 'an end of all perfections;' he is at the world's end presently, and in a few thoughts can see to the bottom of all the world's glory; but when he takes up the truths of God into his thoughts, now he meets with work enough for his admiration and sweet meditation: 'thy commandments are exceeding broad.' Great ships cannot sail in narrow rivers and shallow waters; neither can minds truly great with the knowledge of God and heaven find room enough in the creature to turn and expatiate themselves in. A gracious soul is soon aground and at a stand, when upon these flats; but let it launch out into the meditation of God, his word, the mysterious truths of the gospel, and he finds a place of broad waters, searoom enough to lose himself in. I might here shew you the excellency of Divine truths from many heads, as from the source and spring-head whence they flow, the God of truth; from their opposite, that mishappen monster, error, &c. But I shall only direct your meditation to a few enamouring properties which you shall find in these truths. You may meet a heap of them together in Psa. xix. 7, and so on. Truth it is 'pure;' this made David love it, Psa. cxix. 140. It is not only pure, but makes the soul pure and holy that embraceth it. 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth,' John xvii. 17. It is the pure water that God washeth foul souls clean with, Ezek. xxxxvi. 25; 'I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness will I cleanse you; foul puddle water will as soon make the face, as error make the soul clean. Truth is 'sure,' and hath a firm bottom, Psa. xix. 7. We may lay the whole weight of our souls upon it, and yet not crack under us. Cleave to truth, and it will stick to thee; it will go with thee to prison, banishment, yea, stake itself, and bear thy charges wherever thou goest upon her errand. 'Not one thing,' saith Joshua, 'hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, not one thing hath failed thereof,' Josh. xxiii. 14. Whatever you find there promised, counteth money in your purse. 'Fourscore years,' said Polycarp, 'I have served God and found him a good Master.' But when men think by forsaking the truth to provide well for themselves, they are sure to meet with disappointments. Many have been flattered from truth with goodly promises, and then served no better than Judas was by the Jews, after he had betrayed his Master into their bloody hands; 'See thou to that.' Though persecutors love the treason, yet they hate the traitor; yea, oft, to shew their devlish malice, they, when some have been got to wound their conscience by denying the truth, have most cruelly butchered them, and gloried in it, as a full revenge to destroy soul and body together. Again, truth is 'free,' and makes the soul 'free' that cleaves to it, John viii. 32: 'The truth shall make you free.' Christ tells the Jews of a bondage they were in, which that brag-people never dreamed on, ver. 44: 'Ye are of your father the devil, and his lusts you will do;' such slaves are all sinners, they must do what the devil will have them, and dare no more displease him than a child his father with a rod in his hand. Some witches have confessed that they have been forced to send out their imps to do mischief to others, that they might have ease themselves; for till they did send them abroad upon such an errand, they were themselves tormented by them. And he who hath a lust sucking on him, finds as little rest, if he be not always serving of it, and making provision for it. Can the world, think you, shew such another slave as this poor wretch is? Well, though all the bolts that the devil hath, lusts I mean, were locked upon one sinner, and he shut up in the closest dungeon of all his prison, yet let but this poor slave begin to be acquainted with the truth of

Digitized by Google

Christ, so as to open his heart to it, and close with it, you shall soon hear that the foundations of the prison are shaken, its doors thrown open, and the chains fallen off the poor creature's legs. Truth cannot itself be bound, nor will it dwell in a soul that lies bound in sin's prison; and therefore when once truth and the soul are agreed, or rather Christ and the soul, who are brought together by truth, then the poor creature may lift up his head with joy, for his redemption and jail-delivery from his spiritual bondage draws nigh; yea, the day is come, the key is in the lock already to let him out. It is impossible we should be acquainted with truth as it is in Jesus, and be mere strangers to this liberty that attends it, Eph. iv. 19—21. In a word, lastly, Truth is victorious. It is great, and shall prevail at last. It is the great counsel of God, and though many fine plots and devices are found in the hearts of men, which shew what they would do, yet the counsel of the Lord shall stand; all their eggs are addle, when they have sat longest on them; alas! they want power to hatch what their malice sits brooding on. Sometimes, I confess, the enemies to truth get the militia of this lower world into their hands, and then truth seems to go to the ground, and those that witness to it are even slain; yet then it is more than their persecutors can do to get them laid under ground in their grave, Rev. xi. 9. Some, that were never thought on, shall strike in on truth's side, and forbid the burial. Persecutors need not be at cost for marble to write the memorial of their victories in, dust will serve well enough, for they are not like to last so long. Three days and a half the witnesses may lie dead in the streets, and truth sit disconsolate by them; but within a while they are walking, and truth triumphing again. If persecutors could kill their successors, then their work might be thought to stand strong, needing not to fear another to pull down what they have set up; and yet then their work would lie as open to Heaven, and might be as easily hindered, as theirs at Babel. Who loves not to be on the winning side? Choose truth for thy side, and thou hast it. News may come that truth is sick, but never that it is dead. No, it is error is short-lived: 'a lying tongue is but for a moment;' but truth's age runs parallel with God's eternity. It shall live to see their heads laid in the dust, and to walk over their graves, that were so busy to make one for her. Live, did I say? yea, reign in peace with those who now are willing to suffer with and for it. And wouldst thou not, Christian, be one among that goodly train of victors, who shall attend on Christ's triumphant chariot into the heavenly city, there to take the crown, and sit down in thy throne, with those that have kept the field when Christ and his truth were militant here on earth? Thus, wouldst thou but in thy thoughts wipe away tears and blood, which now cover the face of suffering truth, and present it to thy eye as it shall look in glory, thou couldst not but cleave to it with a love stronger than death.

But, Secondly, If yet there remains any qualm of fear on thy heart, from the wrath of bloody men threatening thee for thy profession of the truth, then to a heart inflamed with the love of truth, labour to add a heart filled with the fear of that wrath which God hath in store for all that apostatize from the truth. When you chance to burn your finger, you hold it to the fire, which being a greater fire, draws out the other. Thus, when thy thoughts are scorched, and thy heart scared with the fire of man's wrath, hold them a while to hell fire, which God hath prepared for the fearful, Rev. xxi. 8, and all that run away from truth's colours, Heb. x. 39, and thou wilt lose the sense of the one for fear of the other. *Ignosce imperator*, saith the holy man, *tu carcerem, Deus gehennam minatur;* 'Pardon me, O emperor, if I obey not thy command; thou threatenest a prison, but God a hell.' Observable is that of David, Psa. cxix. 161: 'Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.' He had no cause to fear them that had no cause to persecute him; one threatening out of the word, that sets the point of God's wrath to his heart, scares him more than the worst that the greatest on earth can do to him. Man's wrath, alas! when hottest, is but a temperate climate to the wrath of the living God. They who have felt both have testified as much. Man's wrath cannot hinder the access of God's love to the creature, which hath made the saints sing in the fire, in spite of their enemies' teeth. But the creature under God's wrath is like one shut up in a close oven, no crevice open to let any of the heat out, or any refreshing in to him.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE SECOND KIND OF TRUTH, TRUTH OF HEART, OR SINCERITY, WITH THE KINDS OF IT; AND IN PARTICULAR OF MORAL UPRIGHTNESS, TOGETHER WITH ITS DEFICIENCY; AND A DOUBLE CAUTION ABOUT THIS; THE ONE TO THE SAINTS, THE OTHER TO THE MORALLY UPRIGHT PERSON.

We come now to the second kind of 'truth' commended to the Christian under the notion of the soldier's girdle, and that is 'truth of heart.' Where it would be known, First, What I mean by truth of heart. Secondly, Why compared to a girdle. For the

First, By truth of heart I understand sincerity, so taken in Scripture, Heb. x. 22: 'Let us draw near with a true heart;' that is, with a sincere heart. We have them oft conjoined, the one explaining the other, Josh. xxiv. 14: 'Fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth.' 1 Cor. v. 8, we read of 'the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' Hypocrisy is a lie with a fair cover over it; an insincere heart is a false heart; the inward frame and motion of the heart comports not with the profession and behaviour of the outward man; like a clock, whose wheels within go not as the hand points without.

Secondly, Sincerity, or truth of heart, may fitly be compared to a girdle, in regard of the twofold use and end for which a girdle, especially the soldier's belt, is worn.

First, The girdle is used as an ornament put on uppermost, to cover the joints of the armour, which would, if seen, cause some uncomeliness. Here, at the loins I mean, those pieces of armour for the defence of the lower parts of the body are fastened to the upper; now, because they cannot be so closely knit and clasped, but there will be some little gaping betwixt piece and piece, therefore they used to put over those parts a broad girdle, that covered all that uncomeliness. Now sincerity doth the same for the Christian, what the girdle doth for the soldier. The saint's graces are not so close, nor his life so exact, but in the best there are found infirmities and defects, which are as so many gapings and clefts in his armour; but sincerity covers all, that he is neither put to shame for them, nor exposed to danger by them.

Secondly, The girdle was used for strength; by this the loins were staid and united, and the soldier made stronger to fight or march: as a garment, the closer it sits the warmer it is; so the belt, the closer it is girt, the more strength the loins feel; hence God, threatening to enfeeble and weaken a person or people, saith, 'Their loins shall be loosened,' Isa. xiv. 1: 'I will loose the loins of kings;' and Job xii. 21, 'He weakeneth the strength of the mighty.' He looseth the girdle of the strong.

Now sincerity may well be compared, in this respect, to the soldier's girdle. It is a grace that doth gird the soul with strength, and makes it mighty to do or suffer. Indeed it is the very strength of every grace; so much hypocrisy as is found cleaving to our graces, so much weakness. It is sincere faith that is the strong faith; sincere love that is the mighty love. Hypocrisy is to grace as the worm is to the oak, the rust to the iron—it weakens them, because it corrupts them. The metaphor thus opened affords these two doctrinal conclusions; in handling of which I shall comprise what I have to say further of this piece of armour.

Doct. 1. That sincerity, or truth of heart in our ways, covers all the Christian's uncomeliness.

Doct. 2. The truth of heart, or sincerity, is of excellent use to strengthen the Christian in his whole course.

Doct. 1. To begin with the first, Sincerity covers all our uncomeliness. In handling of this point, this is our method:

First, To inquire which is the truth and sincerity that doth this.

Secondly, We shall inquire what uncomelinesses they are that sincerity covers.

Thirdly, How sincerity covers them.

Fourthly, Why sincerity doth this, or some account given for all this.

First, of the first, Let us inquire which is that truth and sincerity that covers all uncomelinesses and deficiencies in the Christian. Here we must distinguish of a twofold sincerity; one moral, another evangelical.

Digitized by Google

First, There is a moral truth and uprightness which we may call a field-flower, because it may be found growing in the wild and waste of nature. It cannot be denied, but one that hath not a dram of sanctifying, saving grace may shew some kind of uprightness and truth in his actions. God himself comes in as a witness for Abimelech, that what he did in taking Sarah was in the uprightness of his heart, Gen. xx. 6; 'I know,' saith God, 'that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart;' that is, Thou didst mean honestly as to this particular business, and didst not intend any wrong to Abraham, whose wife she was, unknown to thee. Joab, though a bloody man, yet dealt very uprightly and squarely with David, concerning the rendition of Rabbah, when he had a fair advantage of stealing away the honour from his prince to himself. Many such instances may be given of men that have been great strangers to a work of grace on their hearts; but this is not the uprightness that we mean in the point laid down. It doth indeed render a person very lovely and amiable before men, to be thus upright and honest in his dealings; but methinks I hear the Lord saying, concerning such, as once he did to Samuel of Eliab, 1 Sam. xvi. 7, 'Look not on their countenance,' so as to think these are they which he accepts; no, he hath refused them, 'for the Lord seeth not as man seeth.' God's eye looks deeper than man's. They are two great defects in this uprightness, which God rejects it for.

First, It grows not from a good root, a renewed heart. This is a hair on the moral man's pen, which blurs and blots his copy when he writes fairest. It is like the leprosy of Naaman; that same, 'but he was a leper,' took away the honour of his greatness at court and prowess in the field; so here it stains the fairest actions of a mere moral man, 'but he is a Christless, graceless person.' The uprightness of such does others more good in this world than themselves in another. They are by this moral honesty profitable to those that have civil commerce with them; but it doth not render themselves acceptable to God. Indeed, had not God left some authority of conscience to awe and keep them that have no grace within some bounds of honesty, this world would have been no more habitable for the saints than the forest of wild beasts is now for man. And such is the uprightness of men, void of sanctifying grace, that they are rather rid by an overpowering light of conscience that scares them, than sweetly led by any inward principle inclining them to take complacency in that which is good. Abimelech himself, for whom, as we heard, God so apologized, yet is let to know, that his honesty in that matter came rather from God's restraint upon him, than any real goodness in him, Gen. xx.: 'I also withheld thee from sinning against me, therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.'

Secondly, This moral uprightness falls short of the chief and indispensably necessary to make a person upright indeed: this is, the glory of God: 1 Cor. x. 31, 'Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' The archer may lose his game by shooting short, as well as shooting wide. The gross hypocrite shoots wide, the uprightest moralist shoots short. He may and oft doth take his aim right, as to the particular and immediate end of his action, but ever fails in regard of the ultimate end. Thus, a servant may be faithful to his master, scorn to wrong him of a farthing, yea, cordially seek his master's profit, and yet God never looked at, or thought of, in all this, and so all worth nothing, because God is left out of the story, who is principally to be regarded, Eph. vi. 7: servants are commanded to 'do their service as to God, not to man; that is, not only, not chiefly to man. It is true, the master is not to be looked at in the servant's duty, but in his way, only as it leads to the glory of God; he must not, when he hath desired to please his earthly master, sit down as at his journey's end, but pass on, as the eye doth through the air and clouds to the sun, where it is terminated; so he to God, as the chief end why he is dutiful and faithful to man. Now, no principle can lead the soul so high as to aim at God, but that which comes from God. See both these excellently couched together, Phil. i. 10, 11: 'That ye may be sincere, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.' Where you may observe, First, that the sincerity of the right stamp is that which brings forth fruits of righteousness to the praise of God; that is, where the glory of God is the end of all our actions. Secondly, That such fruit cannot be borne but by Christ; the soul must be planted into Christ before it can be thus sincere, to bear fruits of righteousness to the praise of God. Hence these

Digitized by Google

fruits of righteousness are said to be by Jesus Christ. What men do by themselves, they do for themselves; they eat their own fruit, devour the praise of what they do. The Christian only that doth all by Christ, doth all for Christ; he hath his sap from Christ, into whom he is graffed, that makes him fruitful, and therefore he reserves all the fruit he bears for him. Thus we see how this moral uprightness is itself fundamentally defective, and therefore cannot be that girdle which hides and covers our other defects: yet, before I pass on to the other, I would leave a twofold caution for improvement of what hath been said concerning this uprightness; the one is to the sincere Christian, the other is to such as have no more than a moral uprightness.

Custom 1. To the sincere Christian. May there be found a kind of uprightness among men that are carnal and destitute of God's sanctifying grace? O then look you to it, in whose hearts dwell the Spirit of grace, that you be not put to shame by those that are graceless, which you must needs be when you are taken tardy in those things that they cannot be charged for. Many among them there are that scorn to lie: shall a saint be taken in an untruth? Their moral principles bind them over to the peace, and will not suffer them to wrong their neighbour: and can cheating, overreaching, oppression, follow a saint's hand? Except your righteousness exceeds their best, you are not Christians; and can you let them exceed you in those things which, when they are done, leave them short of Christ and heaven? It is time for the scholar to throw off his gown, and disclaim the name of an academic, when every schoolboy is able to dunce and pose him. And for him also to lay aside his profession, and let the world know what he is, yea, what he never was, that can let a mere civil man, with his weak bow, only backed with moral principles, outshoot him that pretends to Christ and his grace. I confess it sometimes so falls out, that a saint under a temptation may be outstripped by one that is carnal in a particular case; as a lackey that is an excellent footman may, from some prick or present lameness in his foot, be left behind by one that at another time should not be able to come near him. We have too many sorrowful examples of moral men's outstripping even a saint, at a time when under a temptation, a notable passage we meet with concerning Abimelech's speech to Sarah, after her dissembling and equivocating speech, that Abraham was her brother, Gen. xx. 16: 'And unto Sarah he said,' that is, Abimelech said to her, 'Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes unto all that are with thee, and with all other.' Now mark the words which follow: 'Thus she was reproved.' How? where lies the reproof? Here are none but good words, and money to boot also. He promiseth protection to her and Abraham; none should wrong him in wronging her; and tells her what he had freely given Abraham. Well, for all this we shall find a sharp reproof, though lapped up in these sweet words, and silvered over with his thousand pieces. First, She was reproved by the uprightness of Abimelech in that business, wherein she had sinfully dissembled. That he who was a stranger to the true God and his worship should be so square and honest as to deliver her up untouched, when once he knew her to be another man's wife; and not only so, but instead of falling into a passion of anger, and taking up thoughts of revenge against them, for putting this cheat upon him, which, having them under his power, had not been strange for a prince to have done,—for him to forget all this, and rather shew such kindness and high bounty to them, this must needs send a sharp reproof home to Sarah's heart, especially considering that he, a heathen, did all this, and she, one called to the knowledge of God, in covenant with God, and the wife of a prophet, was so poor-spirited as, for fear of a danger, which only her husband, and that without any great ground, surmised, to commit two sins at one clap,—dissemble, and also hazard the loss of her chastity; the least of which was worse than the thing they were so afraid of: these things, I say, laid together, amounted to such a reproof, as no doubt made her, and Abraham too, heartily ashamed before God and man. Again, Abimelech, in calling Abraham her brother, not her husband, did give her a smart rebuke, putting her in mind how with that word he had been deceived by them. Thus godly Sarah was reproved by a profane king. O Christians! take heed of putting words into the mouths of wicked men to reprove you withal; they cannot reprove you, but they reproach God. Christ is put to shame

Digitized by Google

with you, and by you: for the good name's sake of Christ, which cannot but be dearer to you, if saints, than your lives, look to your walking, and especially your civil converse with the men of the world; they know not what you do in your closet, care not what you are in the congregation; they judge you by what you are when they have to do with you. As they find you in your shop, bargains, promises, and such like, so they think of you and your profession. Labour therefore for this uprightness to man; by this you may win some and judge others. Better vex the wicked world with strict walking, as Lot did the Sodomites, than set them on work to mock and reproach thee and thy profession by any scandal, as David did by his sad fall. They that will not follow the light of thy holiness, will soon spy the thief in the candle, and point at it.

Caution 2. The second word of caution is to those that are morally, upright, and no more. Take heed this uprightness proves not a snare to thee, and keeps thee from getting evangelical uprightness. I am sure it was so to the young man in the gospel. In all likelihood he might have been better, had he not been so good. His honesty and moral uprightness was his undoing, or rather his conceit of them, to cast himself in them. Better he had been a publican, driven to Christ in the sense of his sin, than a Pharisee, kept from him with an opinion of his integrity. These, these are the weeds, with which many, thinking to save themselves by, keep themselves under water to their perdition. 'There is more hope of a fool,' Solomon tells us, 'than of one wise in his own conceit;' and of the greatest sinner, than of one conceited of his righteousness. If once the disease take the brain, the cure must needs be the more difficult: no offering Christ to one in the frenzy. Art thou one kept from these unrighteous ways wherein others walk? May be thou art honest and upright in thy course, and scornest to be found false in any of thy dealings. Bless God for it, but take heed of blessing thyself in it; there is the danger; this is one way of being 'righteous over-much;' a dangerous pit, of which Solomon warns all that travel in heaven road, Eccles. vii. 16. There is undoing in this over-doing, as well as in any under-doing; for so it follows in the same verse, 'Why shouldst thou destroy thyself? Thou art not, proud man, so fair for heaven, as thou flatterest thyself. A man upon the top of one hill may seem very nigh to the top of another, and yet can never come there, except he comes down from that where he is. The amount of thy civil righteousness, and moral uprightness, on which thou standest so confidently, seems perhaps level in thy proud eye to God's holy hill in heaven, yea, so nigh, that thou thinkest to step over from one to the other with ease. But let me tell thee, it is too great a stride for thee to take; thy safer way and nearer were to come down from thy mountain of self-confidence, where Satan hath set thee on a design to break thy neck, and to go the ordinary road, in which all that ever got heaven went; and that is, by labouring to get an interest in Christ and his righteousness, which is provided on purpose for the creature to wrap up his naked soul in, and to place his faith on; and thus thy uprightness, which before was but of the same form with the heathen's moral honesty, may commence, or rather be baptized, Christian, and become evangelical grace; but let me tell thee this before I dismiss thee, that thou canst not lay hold of Christ's righteousness till thou hast let fall the lie, thy own righteousness, which hitherto thou hast held so fast in thy right hand. When Christ called the blind man to him, Mark x. 50, it is said, 'He, casting away his garment, rose and came to Jesus;' do thou so, and then come and welcome.

CHAPTER VII.

OF EVANGELICAL OR GODLY SINCERITY, WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT UNCOMELINESSES THIS GIRDLE COVERS, AS ALSO HOW IT COVERS THEM.

We proceed to the second kind of truth, or uprightness, which I called an evangelical uprightness. This is a plant found growing only in Christ's garden, or the enclosure of a gracious soul. It is, by way of distinction from that I called moral, known by the name of a 'godly sincerity,' or the sincerity of God, 2 Cor. i. 12: 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.' Now in two respects this

Digitized by Google

evangelical sincerity may be called godly sincerity. First, because it is of God. Secondly, because it aims at God, and ends in God.

Section I.—First, It is of God. It is his creature, begot in the heart by his Spirit alone. Paul, in the place aforementioned, 2 Cor. i. 12, doth excellently derive its pedigree for us. What he calls walking in 'godly sincerity' in the first part of the verse, he calls 'having our conversation by the grace of God' in the latter part; yea, opposeth it to 'walking with fleshly wisdom in the world,' the great wheel in the moral man's clock; and what doth all this amount to, but to shew that this sincerity is a babe of grace, and calls none on earth father? But this is not all; this godly sincerity is not only of divine extraction (for so are common gifts that are supernatural, the hypocrite's boon as well as the saint's) but it is part of the new creature, which his sanctifying Spirit forms and works in the elect, and none besides. It is a covenant-grace, Ezek. xi. 19: 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you.' That 'one heart' is this godly, sincere heart, opposed to the double heart, or a heart and a heart, by which the hypocrite is so often described in the word.

Secondly, It aims at God, and ends in God. The highest project and most ultimate end that a soul, thus sincere, is big with, is, how it may please God. The disappointment such a godly, sincere person meets with from any other, troubles him no more than it would a merchant, who speeds in the main end of his voyage to the Indies, and returns richly laden with the prize of gold and silver he went for, but only looseth his garter or shoestring in the voyage. As the master's eye directs the servant's hand, if he can do his business to his master's mind, he hath his wish, though strangers, who came into the shop, like it not. Thus godly sincerity acquiesceth in the Lord's judgment of him. Such a one shoots not at small nor great, studies not to accommodate himself to any, to hit the humour of rich or poor, but singles out God in his thoughts from all other, as the chief object of his love, fear, faith, joy, &c.; he directs all his endeavours like a wise archer at this white, and when he can most approve himself to God, he counts he shoots best. Hear holy Paul speaking, not only his own private thoughts, but the common sense of all sincere believers, 2 Cor. v. 9; 'We labour, whether present or absent, that we may be accepted of him.' The world's true man is he that will not wrong man: though many go thus far, who can make bold with God for all their demure carriage to man. Some that would not steal the worth of a penny from their neighbour, yet play the notorious thieves with God in greater matters than all the money their neighbour hath is worth. They can steal that time from God, to gratify their own occasions, which he hath inclosed for himself, and lays peculiar claim to (the Sabbath-day, I mean) by such a title as will upon trial be found stronger, I trow, then we can shew for the rest of the week to be ours. Others will not lie to man possibly in their dealing with him (and it were better living in the world, if there were more of this truth among us); but these very men, many of them, yea, all that are not more than morally upright, make nothing of lying to God, which they do in every prayer they make, promising to do what they never bestow a serious thought how they may perform: they say they will sanctify God's name, and yet throw dirt in the face of every attribute in it; they pray that the will of God may be done, and yet while they know their sanctification is his will, they content themselves with their unholy hearts and natures and think it enough to beautify the front of their lives, that part which faceth man, and stands to the street, as I may so say, with a few flourishes of civility and justness in their worldly dealings, though their inward man lies all in woful ruins at the same time. But he is God's true man that desires to give unto God the things that are God's, as well as unto man the things that are man's; yea, who is first true to God, and then to man for his sake. Good Joseph, when his brethren feared, as strangers to him (for yet they knew no other), they should receive some hard measure at his hands, mark what course he takes to free their troubled thoughts from all suspicion of any unrighteous dealing from him: 'Do this,' saith he, 'and live, for I fear God,' Gen. xlii. 18. As if he had said, Expect nothing from me, but what is square and upright, for I fear God; you possibly think, because I am a great man, and you poor strangers, where you have no friend to intercede for you, that my might should bear down your right; but you may save yourselves the trouble of such jealous thoughts

Digitized by Google

concerning me, for I see One infinitely more above me than I seem to be above you, and him I fear, which I could not do, if I should be false to you. The word, 2 Cor. i. 12, for sincerity, is emphatical, *eilikrineia*, a metaphor from things tried by the light of the sun, as when you are buying cloth, or such-like ware, you will carry it out of the dark shop, and hold it up to the light, by which the least hole in it is discovered: or as the eagle, say some, holds up her young against the sun, and judgeth them her own, if able to look up wishly against it, or spurious if not able. Truly, that is the godly, sincere soul, which looks up to heaven, and desires to be determined in his thoughts, judgment, affections, and practices, as they can stand before the light which shines from thence through the word, the great luminary into which God hath gathered all light for guiding souls, as the sun in the firmament is for directing our bodies in their walking to and fro in the world. If these suit with the word, and can look on it without being put to shame by it, then, on the sincere soul goes in his enterprise with courage, nothing shall stop him; but if any of these be found to shun the light of the word (as Adam would, if he could, the seeing of God), not being able to stand to its trial, than he is at his journey's end, and can be drawn forth by no arguments from the flesh; for it goes not on the flesh's errand, but on God's; and he that sends him shall only stay him. Things are true or right, as they agree with their first principles. When the counterpart agrees with the original writing, then it is true; when a measure agrees with the legal standard or town bushel, then it is true; now the will of God is standard to all our wills, and he is the sincere man, that labours to take the rule and measure of all his affections and actions from that. Hence David is called a man after God's own heart, which is but a periphrasis of his sincerity, and is as much as if the Spirit of God, had said, He was an upright man, he carries on his heart the sculpture and image of God's heart, as it is engraved on the seal of the word. But enough for the present; this may serve to shew what is evangelical uprightness. Three things would be desired further, before we fall on the application.

First, To shew what uncomelinesses they are that sincerity covers.

Secondly, How sincerity covers these.

Thirdly, Why this evangelical sincerity doth cover these. We shall give some account to all.

Section II.—*Quest.* 1. Of the first, What uncomeliness doth sincerity cover?

Answ. I answer, all, especially sinful. There are several external temporal privileges, in which if any fall short (such excellency does this vain world put in them, more than their intrinsical worth calls for), they are exposed to some dishonour, if not contempt, in the thoughts of others. Now where sincere grace is, it affords a fair cover to them all; yea puts more abundant honour on the person in the sight of God, angels, and men also, if wise, than the other can occasion contempt.

First, Beauty: this is the great idol which the whole world 'wanders after,' as they are after the 'Beast,' Rev. xiii., which if God denies, and confines the souls of some to a more uncomely house (body I mean) than others, this their mean bodily presence prejudiceth them in the esteem of others. Now grace, if it be but graced with sincerity, shines through the cloud that nature hath darkened the countenance withal, Eccl. viii. 1: 'Wisdom makes the face to shine.' Who that hath the use of his reason would not prize and choose the vessel in the cellar, full of generous wine, before a gilt urn that hangs up empty at the door for a sign? If sincere grace fills not the heart within, the beauty with which nature hath gilt the face without makes the person but little worth. A beautiful person without true grace is but a fair stinking weed; you know the best of such a one, if you look on him furthest off; whereas a sincere heart, without this outward beauty to commend it, is like some sweet flower (not painted with such fine colours on the leaves), better in the hand than eye, to smell on, than look on; the nearer you come to the sincere soul, the better you find him. Outward uncomliness, to true grace, is but as some old, mean buildings you sometimes see stand before a goodly, stately house, which hide its glory only from the traveller that passeth by at some distance; but he that comes in, sees its beauty, and admires it.

2. Again, A mean parentage, and inglorious descent, is much despised in

Digitized by Google

the world. Well, how base soever the stock and ignoble the birth be, when grace unfeigned comes, it brings arms with it, it clarifies the blood, and makes the house illustrious. 'Since thou wast precious in my eye, thou hast been honourable,' Isa. iv. 4. Sincerity sets a mark of honour; if you see this star shining, though over a mean cottage, it tells thee a great prince dwells there, an heir of heaven. Sincerity brings the creature into alliance with a high family, no less than of the high God; by which new alliance, his own inglorious name is blotted out, and a new name given him; he bears the name of God, to whom he is joined by a faith unfeigned; and who dares say that the God of heaven's child, or Christ's bride, are of an ignoble birth.

3. Again, A low purse, as well as a low parentage, exposeth to contempt, yea, more; some by their purse redeem themselves in time, as they think, from the scorn of their mean stock. The little spring from whence the water came, by that time it hath run some miles, and swelled into a broad river, is out of sight, and not inquired much after: but poverty, that itself sounds reproach in the ears of this proud world. Well, though a man were poor, even to a proverb, yet if a vein of true godliness, sincere grace, be but to be found running in his heart, here is a rich mine, that will lift him up above all the world's contempt; such a one may possibly say he hath no money in his house, but he cannot say that he hath no treasure, that he is not rich, and speak true; he sure is rich that hath a key to God's treasury. The sincere soul is rich in God; what God hath is his: 'all is yours, you are Christ's.'

4. Again, In a word, to name no more parts and endowments of the mind, these are applauded above all the former by some; and indeed they carry in them an excellency, that stands more level to his noblest faculty, reason, than the other, which are so far beneath its spiritual nature, that as Gideon's soldiers, some of them, could not drink the water till they bowed down on their knees, so neither could man take any relish in these, did he not first debase himself far beneath the lofty stature of his reasonable soul; but knowledge, parts, and abilities of the mind, these seem to lift up man's head, and make him that he loseth none of his height; and therefore none so contemptible by the wise world, as those that are of weak parts, and mean intellectual abilities. Well, now let us see what cover sincerity hath for this nakedness of the mind, which seems the most shameful of all the rest. Where art thou, Christian, that I may tell thee, who sits lamenting and bemoaning thy weak parts and shallow understanding, what a happy man thou art, with thy honest, sincere heart, beyond all compare with these, whose sparkling parts do so dazzle thy eyes, that thou canst not see thy own privilege above them? Their pearl is but in the head, and they may be toads for all that; but thine is in the heart, and it is the pearl of grace, that is, the pearl of greatest price. Thy sincere heart sets thee higher in God's heart, than thy weak parts do lay thee low in their deceived opinion: and thou, without the abilities of mind that they have, shalt find the way to heaven; but they, for all their strong parts, shall be tumbled down to hell, because they have not thy sincerity. Thy mean gifts do not render thee incapable of heaven's glory; but their unsanctified gifts and endowments are sure to make them capable of more of hell's shame and misery. In a word, though here thy head be weak, and parts low, yet for thy comfort know, thou shalt have a better head given thee to thy sincere heart, when thou comest to heaven; but their knowing heads shall not meet with better hearts in hell, but be yoked eternally to their own wicked ones in torment; but enough of this. I come to the second kind of uncomeliness which sincerity covers, and that is, sinful.

Secondly, Now this sinful uncomeliness must needs be the worst, because it lights on the most beautiful part, the soul: if dirt thrown on the face be more uncomely that on another member, because it is the fairest, then no uncomeliness like that which crocks and blacks the soul and spirit, because this is intended by God to be the prime seat of man's beauty. Now that which most stains and deforms the soul, must be that which most opposeth its chief perfection, which in its primitive creation was, and can still be, no other than the beauty of holiness drawn on it by the Holy Spirit's curious pencil; and what can that be but the foul monster which is called sin? This hath marred man's sweet countenance, that he is no more like the beauty of God created, than dead Sarah's face was like that beauty which was a bait for the greatest prince's

Digitized by Google

and made her husband go in fear of his life wherever he came; nay, than the foul fiend, now a cursed devil in hell, is like to the holy angel he was in heaven. This wound which is given by sin to man's nature, Christ hath undertaken to cure by his grace in his elect: the cure is begun here, but not so perfected that no scar and blemish remains; and this is the great uncomliness which sincerity lays its finger on and covers.

Section III.—*Quest.* 2. But here the question may be, How sincerity covers the saints' sinful uncomlinesses?

Ans. I shall answer to this, first, negatively, and shew how it doth not; secondly, affirmatively, how it doth.

First, Negatively, how sincerity doth not cover them; and that in several particulars. First, Sincerity doth not so cover the saints' failings as to take away their sinful nature; wandering thoughts are sins in a saint, as well as in another: a weed will be a weed wherever it grows, though in a garden among the choicest flowers; they mistake then, who, because the saints' sins are covered, deny them to be sins. Secondly, It doth not cover them so as to give us the least ground to think that God doth allow the Christian to commit the least sin more than others: indeed it is inconsistent with God's holiness to give, and with a saint's sincerity to pretend such a dispensation to be given them. A father may, out of his indulgence and love to his child, pass by a failing in his waiting on him; as,if he spills the wine, or breaks the glass he is bringing to him; but sure he will not allow him to throw it down carelessly or willingly. Though a man may be easily entreated to forgive his friend that wounded him unawares, when he meant him no hurt, yet he will not beforehand give him leave to do it. Thirdly, It doth not so cover them as that God should not see them, which is not only derogatory to his omniscience, but to his mercy also; for he cannot pardon what he doth not first see to be sin. God doth not only see the sins of his children, but their failings are more distasteful to him than others', because the persons in which they are found are so dear, and stand so near unto him. A dunghill in a prince's chamber would be more offensive to him than one afar off from his court. The Christian's bosom is God's court, throne, temple; there he hath taken up his rest for ever. Sin there must needs be very unsavoury to his nostrils. Fourthly, It doth not so cover them as that the saints need not confess them, be humbled under them or sue out a pardon for them; a penny is as due a debt as a pound, and therefore to be acknowledged; indeed, that which is a sin of infirmity in the committing, becomes a sin of presumption by hiding of it and hardening in it. Job held fast his integrity throughout his sad conflict; yet those failings which escaped him in the paroxysm of his afflictions brought him upon his knees; 'I abhor myself,' saith he, 'and repent in dust and ashes,' Job xlii. 6. Fifthly, and lastly, It doth not so cover them, as if our sincerity did the least merit and deserve that God should for it cover our other failings and infirmities; were there such a thing as obedience absolutely complete, it could not merit pardon for past sins; much less can an imperfect obedience, as sincerity is in a strict sense, deserve it for present failing. Obedience legally perfect is no more than, as creatures, we owe to the law of God; and how could that pay the debt of sin, which was itself due debt before any sin was committed? Much less can evengelical obedience, which is sincerity, do it, that falls short by far of that obedience we do owe. If he that owes twenty pounds merits nothing when he pays the whole sum, then surely he doth not that of the twenty pounds he owes pays but twenty pence. Indeed creditors may take what they please, but if they will say half satisfies them, it is discharge enough to the debtor. But where did ever God say he would thus compound with his creature? God stands as strictly upon it in the gospel covenant to have the whole debt paid, as he did in the first of works. There was required a full righteousness in keeping, or a full curse for breaking of the law; so there is in the evengelical; only here the wards of the lock are changed. God required this at the creature's hand, in the first covenant, to be personally performed or endured; but in the gospel covenant he is content to take both at the hands of Christ our surety, and impute these to the sincere soul that unfeignedly believes on him, and gives up himself to him.

Section IV.—Secondly, To shew positively how sincerity covers the saints' failings.

Digitized by Google

First, Sincerity is that property to which pardoning mercy is annexed. True indeed, it is Christ that covers all our sins and failings; but it is only the sincere soul over which he will cast his skirt. Psa. xxxii. 2: 'Blessed is he whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.' None will doubt this; but which is the man? The next words tell us his name; 'and in whose spirit there is no guile.' Christ's righteousness is the garment that covers the nakedness and shame of our unrighteousness; faith, the grace that puts this garment on; but what faith? None but the faith unfeigned, as Paul calls it, 2 Tim. i. 'Here is water,' said the enuch; 'what doth hinder me to be baptized?' Acts viii. 36. Now mark Philip's answer, ver. 37: 'If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest;' as if he had said, Nothing but an hypocritical heart can hinder thee. It is the false heart only that finds the door of mercy shut. He that promiseth to cover the sincere soul's failings, threatens to uncover the hypocrite's impiety, Prov. x. 9: 'He that perverteth his way shall be known,' that is, to his shame.

Secondly, Where sincerity is God approves of that soul as a holy righteous person, notwithstanding that mixture of sin which is found in him. As God doth not like the saint's sin for his sincerity, so he doth not unsaint him for that. God will set his hand to Lot's testimonial, that he is a righteous man, though many sins are recorded in the Scripture which he fell into, and foul ones too; and Job perfect, because the frame of his heart was sincere, the tenure of his life holy, and he was rather surprised by them as temptations, than they entertained by him upon choice. Though sincerity doth not blind God's eye, that he should not see the saint's sin, yet it makes him see it with a pitiful eye, and not a wrathful: as a husband, knowing his wife faithful to him in the main, pities her in other weaknesses, and for all them accounts her a good wife. 'In all this,' saith God, 'Job sinned not;' and at the very close of his combat God brings him out of the field with this honourable testimony to his friends, that had taken so much pains to bring his godliness in question, that his servant 'Job had spoke right of him.' Truly God said more of Job than he durst of himself. He freely confesseth his unadvised froward speeches, and cries out, 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.' God saw Job's sins attended with sincerity, and therefore judged him perfect and righteous: Job saw his sincerity dashed with many sad failings, and this made him in the close of all rather confess his sins with shame, than glory in his grace. God's mercy is larger to his children than their charity is many times to themselves and their brethren. First, to themselves: Do you think the prodigal, the emblem of a convert, durst have asked the robe, or desired his father to be at such cost for his entertainment as his father freely bestowed on him? No, sure, a room in the kitchen we see was as high as he durst ask, to be among the meanest servants in the house. Poor soul! he could not conceive he should have such a meeting with his father at first sight. A robe! he might rather look for a rope, at least a rod. A feast at his father's table! O unlooked for welcome! I doubt not but if any one had met him on his way, and told him that his father was resolved, as soon as he came home, not to let him see his face, but immediately send him to bridewell, there to be whipped, and fed with bread and water for many months, and then perhaps he would at last look on him, and take him home, but in his starving condition this would have been good news to him; but as God hath strange punishments for the wicked, so he hath strange expressions of love and mercy for sincere souls. He loves to outdo their highest expectations,—kiss, robe, feast, all in one day, and that the first day of his return, when the memory of his outrageous wickednesses were fresh, and the offensive scent of his swill and swine, from which he was but newly-come, hardly gone! What a great favourite is sincerity with the God of heaven! Again, God's mercy is larger to his children than their charity is towards one another. Those whom we are ready to unsaint for their failings that appear in their lives, God owns for his perfect ones, because of their sincerity. We find Asa's failings expressed, and his perfection vouched by God together, as I may say in a breath, 2 Chron. xv. 17. It was well God cleared that good man; for had but the naked story of his life, as it stands in the Scripture, been recorded, without any express testimony of God's approving him, his godliness would have hazardod a coming under dispute in the opinion

Digitized by Google

of good men; yea, many more with him, concerning whom we are now put out of doubt, because we find them canonized for saints by God himself, would have been cast, if a jury of men, and those holy men too, had gone upon them. Elijah himself, because he saw none have such zeal for God and his worship, as to wear their colours openly in a free profession, and hang out a flag of defiance against the idolatry of the times, by a stout opposing it, as he did, which might be their sin, makes a sad moan to God, as if the apostacy had been so general, that the whole species of the godly had been preserved in his single person. But God brings the holy man better news, 1 Kings xix. 18: 'I have left seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed down to Baal, and every mouth that hath not kissed him.' As if God had said, Comfort thyself, Elijah; though my number be not great; yet neither is there such a dearth of saints as thou fearest in this ungodly age; it is true their faith is weak; they dare not jostle with the sins of the age, as thou dost, for which thou shalt not lose thy reward: yet those night-disciples, that for fear carry their light in a dark lantern, having some sincerity which keeps them from polluting themselves with these idolatries, must not, shall not be disowned by me. That God, who bids us be most tender of his lambs, is much more tender of them himself. Observable is that place, 1 John ii. 12—14. There are three ranks of saints, 'fathers, young men, little children;' and the Spirit of God chiefly shews his tender care of them, as by mentioning them first, ver. 12, so by leaving the sweet promise of pardoning mercy in their lap and bosom, rather than either of the other: 'Little children, I write unto you, for your sins are forgiven you for my name's sake.' But are not the fathers' sins, and the young men's also, forgiven? Yes, who doubts it? But he doth not so particularly apply it to them, as to these; because these, from a sense of their own failings, out of which the other were more grown, were more prone to dispute against this promise in their own bosoms: yea, he doth not only in plain terms tell them their sins are forgiven, but meets with the secret objection which comes from their trembling hearts in opposition to this good news, taken from their own vileness and unworthiness, and stops its mouth with this, 'Forgiven for my name's sake;' a greater name than the name of their biggest sin, which discourageth them from believing.

Thirdly, Sincerity keeps up the soul's credit at the throne of grace, so that no sinful infirmity can hinder its welcome with God. It is the 'regarding of iniquity in the heart,' not the having of it, stops God's ear from hearing our prayer. It is a temptation not a few have found some work to get over, whether such as they, who see so many sinful failings in themselves, may take the boldness to pray, or without presuming to expect audience when they have prayed; and sometimes prevails so far, that because they cannot pray as they would, therefore they forbear what they should; much like some poor people, that keep from the congregation, because they have not such clothes to come in as they desire. To meet with such as are turning away from duty upon this fear, the promises, which are our only ground for prayer, and chief plea in prayer, are accommodated, and fitted to the lowest degree of grace; so that as a picture well drawn faceth all in the room alike that look on it; so the promises of the gospel covenant smile upon all that sincerely look to God in Christ. It is not said, 'If you have faith like a cedar,' but, 'If you have faith like a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove,' Matt. xvii. 20: neither is justifying faith beneath miraculous faith in its own sphere of activity; the least faith on Christ, if sincere, as truly removes the mountainous guilt of sin from the soul, as the strongest; hence all the saints are said to have 'like precious faith,' 2 Pet. i. 1. Sarah's faith, which in Genesis we can hardly see, as the story presents it wherein it appeared, obtains an honourable mention, Heb. xi., where God owns her for a believer, as well as Abraham, with his stronger faith. What love is it the promise entails the favours of God upon? Not 'Grace be with them that love our Lord Jesus' with a seraphim's love, but with a 'sincere' love,' Ephes. vi. 24. Not blessed they who are holy to such a measure: this would have fitted but some saints; the greatest part would have gone away and said, There is nothing for me, I am not so holy; but that no saint might lose his portion, it is, 'Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness:' and this takes in all the children

Digitized by Google

of God, even to the least babe that is newly born this day to Christ. The new convert hungers after holiness, and that sincerely. And wherefore all this care so to lay the promises, but to shew that when we go to make use of any promise at the throne of grace, we should not question our welcome for any of our infirmities, so this stamp of sincerity be upon our hearts. Indeed, if sincerity did not thus much for the saint, there could not be a prayer accepted of God at the hands of any saint that ever was or shall be on earth to the end of the world, because there never was nor shall be such a saint dwelling in flesh here below in whom eminent failings may not be found. The apostle would have us know that Elijah, who did as great wonders in heaven and earth too by prayer, as who greater? yet this man God could soon have picked a hole in his coat. Indeed, lest we attribute the prevalency of his prayers to the dignity of his person, and some eminency which he had by himself in grace above others, the Spirit of God tells us, he was of the same make with his poor brethren: 'Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed,' &c., Jam. v. A weak hand with a sincere heart is able to turn the key in prayer.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ACCOUNT WHY SINCERITY COVERS THE SAINTS' UNCOMELINESS.

Quest. Now follows the fourth query, Whence is it that sincerity thus covers our failings?

SECTION I.—*Reason* 1. It flows from the grace of the gospel covenant, that relaxeth the rigour of the law, which called for complete obedience, by resolving all that into this of sincerity and truth of heart. Thus God, when entering into covenant with Abraham, expresseth himself, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect,' or sincere, Gen. xvii. 1. As if God had said to him, Abraham, see here what I expect at thy hands, and what thou mayest expect at mine. I look that thou shouldst 'set me before thee,' whom in thy whole course and walking thou wilt sincerely endeavour to please and approve thyself to, and at my hands thou mayest promise thyself what an Almighty God can do, both in protecting thee in thy obedience, and pardoning of thee, where thou fallest short of perfect obedience; walk but in the truth of thy heart before me, and in Christ I will accept thee, and thy sincere endeavour, as kindly as I would have done Adam, if he had kept his place in innocency, and never sinned. Indeed a sincere heart by virtue of this covenant might (I mean, the covenant would bear him out, and defend him in it, relying on Christ), converse with God, and walk before him with as much freedom, and more familiarity, by reason of a nearer relation it hath, than ever Adam did, when God and he were best friends. 'If our heart condemn us not,' then, saith the apostle, 'we have confidence towards God,' 1 John iii. 21; we have a boldness of face. And it is not the presence of sin in us, as the covenant now stands, that conscience can, or, if rightly informed concerning the tenure of it, will condemn us for; Paul's conscience cleared him, yea afforded matter of rejoicing and holy glorying, at the same time that he found sin stirring in him. No; conscience is set by God to judge for him in the private court of our own bosoms, and it is bound up by a law, what sentence to give for or against, and that in the same by which Christ himself will acquit or condemn the world at the last day. Now when we go upon the trial for our lives before Christ's bar, the greatest inquest will be, whether we have been sincere or no; and as Christ will not then condemn the sincere soul, though a thousand sins could be objected against it, so neither can our hearts condemn us.

Quest. But here it may be asked, How comes God so favourable in the covenant of the gospel, to accept an obedience so imperfect at his saints' hands, who was so strict with Adam in the first, that the least failing, though but once, escaping him, was to be accounted unpardonable?

Answ. The resolution of this question takes in these two particulars.

First, In the covenant God made with mankind in Adam, there was no sponsor, or surety, to stand bound to God for man's performance of his part in the covenant, which was perfect obedience, and therefore God could do no other but stand strictly with him; because he had none else, from whom he might recover his glory, and thereby pay himself for the wrong man's fault might do

Digitized by Google

to him: but in the gospel covenant there is a surety, Christ the righteous, who stands responsible to God for all the defaults and failings which occur in the Christian's course. The Lord Jesus doth not only take upon him to discharge the vast sums of those sins which he finds them charged with before conversion; but for all those dribbling debts which afterwards, through their infirmity, they contract; 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins,' 1 John ii. 2; so that God may, without any impeachment to his justice, cross his saints' debts, which he is paid for by their Surety: it is mercy indeed to the saints, but justice to Christ, that he should: O happy conjunction, where mercy and justice thus conspire, and kiss each other!

Secondly, God did, and well might require full and perfect obedience of man in the first covenant, because he was in a perfect state of full power and ability to perform it, so that God looked to reap no more than he had planted. But in the gospel covenant God doth not at first infuse into the believer full grace, but true grace; and accordingly he expects not full obedience, but sincere. He considers our frame, and every believer is, if I may so say, rated in God's books as the stock of grace is which God gives to set up withal at first.

SECTION II.—*Reas.* 2. The second reason may be taken from the great love he bears and liking he takes to this disposition of heart, upon which follows this act of grace, to cover their failings where he spies it; it is the nature of love to cover infirmities, even to a multitude. Esther transgressed the law, by coming into Ahasuerus's presence before she was sent for; but love soon erected a pardon-office in the king's breast, to forgive her that fault; and truly she did not find so much favour in the eyes of that great monarch, as the sincere soul doth in the eyes of the great God. He did not more delight in Esther's beauty, than God doth in this, Prov. xi. 20, 'Such as are upright in their way are his delight;' his soul closeth with that man, as one that suits with the disposition of his own holy nature, one whose heart is right with his heart; and so with infinite content to see a ray of his own excellency sparkle in his creature, he delights in him, and takes him by the hand, to lift him up into the bosom of his love, a better chariot, I trow, than that which Jehu preferred Jehonadab to, for his faithfulness to him. You seldom find any spoken of as upright in the Scripture, that are passed over with a plain, naked inscription of their uprightness; but some circumstance there is, which, like the costly work and curious engraving about some tombs, tell the passenger they are no ordinary men that lie there. God, speaking of Job's uprightness, represents him as a nonsuch in his age; 'None like him in the earth, a perfect man, and upright.' Mention was before made of his vast estate, and in that also he was a nonsuch; but when God comes to glory over Satan, by telling what a servant he had to wait on him, he doth not count this worth the telling the devil of; nor, Hast thou considered my servant Job, Job i. 8, that there is none so rich? But, none so upright. When God speaks to Caleb's uprightness, see to what a height he exalts him, Numb. xiv. 24: 'But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land,' &c. As if God had said, Here is a man I do not count myself disparaged to own him for my servant, and special favourite; he is one that carries more worth in him than the whole multitude of murmuring Israelites besides; he had 'another spirit,' that is, for excellency, and nobleness, far above the rest; and wherein did this appear? The next words resolve us: 'He hath followed me fully.' Now that which gained him this great honour from God's own mouth, we shall find to be his sincerity, and especially in that business when sent to search the land of Canaan, Joshua xiv. 7, and ver. 9, compared. He had great temptations to tell another tale. The Israelites were so sick of their enterprise, that he should be the welcomest messenger that brought the worst news, from which they might have some colour for their murmuring against Moses, who had brought them into such straits; and of twelve that were sent, there were ten that suited their answer to this discontented humour of the people; so that by making a contrary report to theirs, he did not only come under the suspicion of a liar, but hazard his life among an enraged people; yet such was the courage of this holy man, faithfulness to his trust, and trust in his God, that, as he saith himself, ver. 7, 'He brought him' (that is, Moses, who had sent him,) word again, as it was

Digitized by Google

in his heart;' that is, he did not for fear or favour accommodate himself, but what in his conscience he thought true, that he spake; and this, because it was such an eminent proof of his sincerity, is called by Moses, ver. 9, 'following God fully;' for which the Lord erects such a pillar of remembrance over his head, that shall stand as long as that Scripture itself. To give out one instance more, and that is of Nathaniel, at first sight of whom Christ cannot forbear, but lets all about him know how highly he was in his favour: 'Behold,' saith he of him, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile,' John i. 47. Christ's heart, like the babe in Elizabeth's womb, when Mary saluted her, seemed thus to leap at the coming of Nathaniel, yea, comes forth in this expression, not to flatter him into an overweening conceit of himself, (Christ knew what an humble soul he spake to,) but to bear witness to his own grace in him, especially this of sincerity; that knowing what a high price and value heaven sets upon the head of this grace, they might like wise merchants store themselves with it more abundantly; his simplicity of heart made him an 'Israelite indeed;' many goodly shows and pompous outsides were to be seen among the Pharisees, but they were a company of base projectors and designers. Even when some of them came to Christ, extolling him for his sincerity, 'Master, we know thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth,' Matt. xxii. 16; then did they play the hypocrites, and had a plot to decoy him by their gloring speech into danger; as you may perceive, ver. 15: 'They came that they might entangle him;' but good Nathaniel had no plot in his head, in his coming, but to find the Messias he looked for, and eternal life by him; and therefore though he was for the present wrapped up in that common error of the times, that 'no prophet could come out of Galilee,' John vii. 52, much less so great a one as the Messias, out of such an obscure place in Galilee as Nazareth; yet Christ seeing the honesty and uprightness of his heart, doth not suffer his ignorance and error to prejudice him in his thoughts of him.

Section III.—Now to give some account why this grace of sincerity is so taking with, and delightful to God, that it even captivates him in love to the soul where he finds it. There are two things which are the inseparable companions of sincerity, yea, effects flowing from it, that are very taking to draw love both from God and man.

First, Sincerity makes the soul willing, when it is clogged with so many infirmities as to disable it from the full performance of its duty, yet when the soul stands on tiptoes to be gone after it; as the hawk upon the hand, as soon as ever it sees her game, launcheth forth, and would be upon the wing after it, though possibly held by its sheath to the fist: thus the sincere soul is inwardly pricked and provoked by a strong desire after its duty, though kept back by infirmities; a perfect heart and a willing mind are joined together, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. It is David's counsel to his son Solomon, 'to serve God with a perfect heart, and a willing mind.' A false heart is a shifting heart, puts off its work so long as it dares, and it is little thanks to set about it when the rod is taken down; yet hypocrites are like tops, that go no longer than they are whipped; but the sincere soul is ready and forward, it doth not want will to do a duty, when it wants skill and strength how to do it. The Levites (2 Chron. xxix. 34) are said to be more upright in heart, to sanctify themselves, than the priests were. How appeared that? in this, that they were more forward and willing to the work. No sooner did the word come out of the good king's mouth, concerning a reformation, ver. 10, but presently the Levites arose to sanctify themselves; but some of the priests had not such a mind to the business, and therefore were not so soon ready, ver. 34; shewing more policy than piety therein, as if they would stay and see first how the times would prove, before they would engage. Reformation-work is but an icy path, which cowardly spirits love to have well beaten by others, before they dare come on it; but sincerity is of better metal; like the true traveller, that no weather shall keep him from going his journey when set, the upright man looks not at the clouds, stands not thinking this or that to discourage him, but takes his warrant from the word of God, and having that, nothing but a countermand from the same God that sets him at work shall turn him back. His heart is uniform to the will of God. If God saith, 'Seek my face,' it rebounds and echoes back again, 'Thy face will I seek,' yea, Lord, as if David had said with a good will. Thy word is press-money enough

Digitized by Google

to carry me from this duty to that, whither thou pleasest; may be when the sincere soul is about a duty, he doth it weakly, yet this very willingness of the heart is wonderful pleasing to God. How doth it affect and take the father when he bids his little child go and bring him such a thing, that may be as much as he can well lift, to see him not stand and shrug at the command as hard, but runs to it, and puts forth his whole strength about it, though at last may be he cannot do it; yet the willingness of the child pleaseth him so, that his weakness rather stirs up the father to pity and help him, than to provoke him to chide him. Christ throws this covering over his disciples' infirmities, 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' O! it is obedience, that, like the dropping honey, comes without squeezing, though but little of it, tastes sweetly on God's palate; and such is sincere obedience.

Secondly, Sincerity makes the soul very open and free to God: though the sincere soul hath many infirmities, yet it desires to cloak and hide none of this from God; no, if it could, it would not; and this is that which delights God exceedingly. To be sure, he will cover what such a soul uncovers, 1 John i. 12: 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive.'

It was a high piece of ingenuity and clemency in Augustus, that having promised by a proclamation a great sum of money to any that should bring him the head of a famous pirate, did yet, when the pirate, who had heard of this, brought it himself to him, and laid it at his foot, not only pardon him for his former offences against him, but reward him for his great confidence in his mercy. Truly thus doth God, though his wrath be revealed against all sin and unrighteousness, yet when the soul itself comes freely and humbles itself before him, he cannot stretch forth his arm to strike that soul which gives such glory to his mercy; and this the sincere heart doth. Indeed, the hypocrite, when he has sinned, hides it, as Achan his wedge of gold: he sits brooding on his lust, as Rachel on her father's idols. It is as hard getting a hen off her nest, as such a one to come off his lusts, and disclose them freely to God. If God himself find him not out, he will not bewray himself. I cannot set out the different disposition of the sincere and false heart in this matter better than by the like in a mercenary servant and a child: when a servant, except it be one of a thousand, breaks a glass, or spoils any of his master's goods, all his care is to hide it from his master, and therefore throws the pieces of it away into some dark hole or other, where he thinks they shall never be found; and now he is not troubled for the wrong he hath done his master, but glad that he hath handled the matter so as not to be discovered. Thus the hypocrite would count himself a happy man, could he but lay his sin out of God's sight; it is not the treason he dislikes, but fears to be known that he is a traitor: and therefore, though it be as unfeasible to blind the eye of the Almighty, as with our hand to cover the face of the sun, that it should not shine, yet the hypocrite will attempt it. We find a woe pronounced against such, Isa. xxix. 15: 'Woe unto them that dig deep to hide their counsel from the Lord.' This is a sort of sinners whose care is not to make their peace when they have offended, but to hold their peace, and stand demurely before God, as Gahazi before his master, as if they had been nowhere but where they should be. These are they whom God will put to shame to purpose. The Jews were far gone in this hypocrisy when they justified themselves as a holy people, and put God so hard to it as to make him prove his charge, rather than confess what was too true and apparent; which God upbraids them for, Jer. ii. 23: 'How canst thou say, I am not pollute? I have not gone after Balaam? see thy way in the valley, and know what thou hast done.' Hast thou such a shameless forehead to justify thyself and a hypocritical heart to draw a fair cover over so foul practices? Would you yet pass for saints, and be thought a people unpolluted? Now mark, it is not long, till this hypocritical people, that thus hid their sin, hath shame enough. 'As the thief is ashamed when he is found,' saith the prophet, ver. 26, 'so is the house of Israel ashamed;' that is, as the thief, who at first is so insolent, as to deny the fact he is accused of, yet when upon search the stolen goods are found about him, and he brought to justice for it, then he is put to double shame for his theft, and impudence also in justifying himself; so it is with this people and with all hypocrites, though while in peace, and at ease, they be brag and bold, yea, seem to scorn to be thought what they indeed are; yet there is a

Digitized by Google

time coming, (which, ver. 24, is called, 'their mouth wherein they shall be found,') when God's hue and cry will overtake them, his terrors ransack their consciences, and bring forth what they so stiffly denied, making it appear to themselves and others also what juggling and deceit they have used to shift off their sin. It is easy to think what shame will cover their faces and weigh down their heads while this is doing. God loves to befool those who think they play their game so wisely, because with Ahab they fight against God in a disguise, and will not be known to be the man. But the sincere soul takes another course, and speeds better; as a child when he hath committed a fault doth not stay till others go and tell his father what the matter is, nor till his father makes it appear by his frowning countenance that it is come to his ear, but freely, and of his own accord, goes presently to his father, (being prompted by no other thing than the love he bears to his dear father, and the sorrow which his heart grows every moment he stays bigger and bigger withal for his offence,) and easeth his aching heart by a free and full confession of his fault at his father's foot; and this with plain heartedness, giving his offence the weight of every aggravating circumstance, so that if the devil himself should come after him, to glean up what he hath left, he should hardly find where-withal to make it appear blacker; thus doth the sincere soul to God, adding to his simplicity in confession of his sin such a flow of sorrow, that God, seeing his dear child in such danger of being carried down too far towards despair, if good news from him come not speedily to stay him, cannot but tune his voice rather into a strain of comforting him in his mourning, than chiding him for his sin.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE ODIOUS NATURE OF HYPOCRISY, AND HATEFULNESS OF IT TO GOD.

Use 1.—Doth sincerity cover all defects? Then hypocrisy uncovers the soul, and strips it naked to its shame before God, when set forth with the richest embroidery of other excellences. This is such a scab, that frets into the choicest perfections, and alters the complexion of the soul in God's eye, more than leprosy or pox can do to the fairest face in ours. It is observable, the different character that is given of those two kings of Judah, Asa and Amaziah. Of the first, see 1 Kings xv. 14: 'The high places were not removed; nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his day.' He passeth current for a gracious person, and that with a *non obstante*, 'nevertheless his heart was perfect;' sincerity, like true gold, hath grains allowed for its lightness; his infirmities are not mentioned to stain his honour, and prejudice him in the opinion of any, but rather as the wart or mole, which the curious limmer expresseth on purpose, the more to set forth the beauty of the other parts, so his failings are recorded to cast a greater lustre upon his sincerity; which could, notwithstanding these sins, gain him such a testimony from God's own mouth. But of Amaziah, (see 2 Chron. xxv. 2,) 'He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.' The matter of his actions was good, but the scope and drift of his heart in them was naught; and this but makes a foul blot upon all, and turns his right into wrong; wherein his hypocrisy appeared is expressed, 2 Kings xiv. 3: 'He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father; he did according to all things that Joash his father did.' He did for a while what David did, as to the matter, but imitated Joash as to the manner, whose goodness was calculated to please man rather than God, as appeared in the latter end of his reign, upon the death of his good uncle Jehoiada; him did Amaziah write after, and not David in his uprightness: thus we see Aza's uprightness condemns him in the midst of many failings; but hypocrisy condemns Amaziah doing that which is right. Sincerity, it is the life of all our graces, and puts life into all our duties; and as life makes beautiful, and keeps the body sweet, so sincerity the soul, and all it doth. A prayer breathed from a sincere heart, it is Heaven's delight: take away sincerity, and God saith of it, as Abraham of Sarah, (whom living, he loved dearly, and laid in his bosom,) 'Bury the dead out of my sight;' he hides his eyes, stops his nostril, as when some poisonous carrion is before us. 'Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me: the calling of your assemblies I cannot away with; your appointed feasts my soul hateth, they are

Digitized by Google

a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them.' What hateful thing is this that God cries so out upon? It is nothing but hypocrisy. Surely, friends, that must needs be very loathsome, which makes God speak so coarsely of his own ordinances, yea, makes them a Nehushtan prayer no prayer, but a mere idol to be broken in pieces; faith no faith, but a fancy and a delusion; repentance no repentance, but a loud lie, Psa. lxxviii. 34: 'They returned, and inquired early after God;' see how the Spirit of God glosseth upon this, ver. 36, 37: 'Nevertheless they did flatter with their lips, and they lied unto him with their tongues; for their heart was not right with him.' It smoked God out of his own house, and made him out of love with that place, whereof he had said it should be his resting place for ever.

It brought the wrath of God upon that unhappy people to the uttermost. Mark how the commission runs, which God gave the Assyrian, who was the bloody executioner of his fierce wrath upon them, Isa. x. 5, 6: 'O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge 'to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down as mire in the street.' See Jer. vii. 10—13. There needs not the coroner to be sent for, or a jury to go up on this miserable people, to find out how they came to their dismal end; they were an 'hypocritical nation,' that was it they died of. God had rather see the abomination of desolation standing in his temple, making havoc of all, than the abomination of dissimulation mocking him to his face, while they worship him with their lips, and their lusts with their hearts. Of the two, it is more tolerable in God's account, to see a Belshazar, that never had a name of being his servant, to quaff and carouse it to his gods profanely in the bowels of the sanctuary, than for a people that would pass for his servants to pollute them in his own worship by their cursed hypocrisy: if God be dishonoured, woe to that man, of all, that doth it under a shew of honouring him. God singles out the hypocrite as that sort of sinners whom he would deal with hand to hand, and set himself, even in this life, to bear witness against, in a more extraordinary manner than others. The thief, murderer, and other sinners, provision is made by God that the magistrate should meet with them, they come under his cognizance; but the hypocrite, he is one that sins more secretly, God alone is able to find him out, and he hath undertaken it, Ezek. xiv. 7: 'For every one of the house of Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and cometh to a prophet, to inquire of him concerning me,'—(an excellent discription of a hypocrite: he is one that denies God in his heart, reserving it for idols, his lust, yet is as forward as any to enquire after God in his ordinances,)—'I the Lord will answer him by myself.' And how shall he answer him? 'And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord,' ver. 8. That is, my judgments shall be so remarkable on him, that he shall be a spectacle of my wrath for others to see and speak of. Thus God pays the hypocrites often in this life, as Ananias and Sapphira, who died by the hand of God with a lie sticking in their throats; and Judas, who purchased nothing by his hypocritical trade but a halter to hang himself with: his playing the hypocrite with Christ ended with his playing the devil upon himself, when he became his own executioner. But if the hypocrite at any time steals out of the world, before his vizard falls off, and the wrath of God falls on him, it will meet him certainly enough in hell, and it will be poor comfort to him there to think how he hath cheated his neighbours, in arriving at hell, whom they so confidently thought under sail for heaven. The good opinion which he hath left of himself in those that are on earth, will cool no flames for him in hell, where lodgings are taken up, and bespoken for the hypocrite, as the chief guest expected in that infernal court: all other sinners seem but as younger brethern in damnation to the hypocrite, under whom, as the great heir, they receive every one their portion of wrath, beqeathed to them by the justice of God: Matt. xxiv. 51, there the evil servant is threatened by his master 'that he will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites.'

Quest. But why should God be so angry with the hypocrite? He seems a tame creature to other sinners, who, like wild beasts, rage and rave, not fearing

Digitized by Google

to open their mouth like so many wolves against heaven, as if they would tear God out of his throne by their blasphemies and horrid impieties. The hypocrite is not thus woaded with impudency, to sin at noon-day, and spread his tent with Absalom on the house-top. If he be naught, it is in a corner; his maiden-blush modesty will not suffer him to declare his sin, and be seen in the company of it abroad: nay, he denies himself of many sins, which others maintain, and walks in exercise of many duties which the atheistical spirits of the world deride and scorn. Why then should the hypocrite, that lives like a saint to others, be more distasteful to him?

Ans. Indeed the hypocrite at first blush may be taken for a kind of saint, by such as see only his outside, as he passeth by in his holyday dress, which he is beholden to for all the reputation he hath in the thoughts of others, and therefore is fitly by one called the stranger's saint, but a devil to those that know him better. He is like some cunning cripple, that is fain to borrow help from art, to hide the defects of nature, such as false hair to cover his baldness, an artificial eye to blind his blindness from others' sight, and the like for other parts. Here is much ado made to commend him for some beautiful person to others; but what a monster would this man appear should one but see him through the keyhole, as he is in his bedchamber, where all these are laid aside! Truly such a one, and far more scareful, would the hypocrite be found, when out of his acting robes, which he makes use of only when he comes forth upon the stage to play the part of a saint before others. It were enough to affright us only to see the hypocrite uncased; what then will it be to himself, when he shall be laid open before men and angels? So odious this generation is to God, that it is not safe standing near them. Moses, that knew Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, better than the people, who, taken with their seeming zeal, flocked after them in throngs, commands them to depart from the tents of those wicked men, except they had a mind to be consumed with them; such horrid hypocrisy, he expected vengeance would soon overtake. But that it may appear to be a sin exceeding sinful, I shall give a few aggravations of it, in which so many reasons will be wrapped why it is so odious to God.

First, Hypocrisy is a sin that offers violence to the very light of nature; that light which convinceth us there is a God, tells us he is to be served, and that in truth also, or all is to no purpose. A lie is a sin that would fly in the face of a heathen, and hypocrisy is the loudest lie, because it is given to God himself; so Peter told that dissembling wretch, Acts v. 3, 4: 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? thou hast lied not unto man, but unto God.'

Secondly, Hypocrisy cannot so properly be said to be one single sin, as the sinfulness of other sins; it is among sins, as sincerity among graces: now that is not one grace; but an ornament that beautifies and graces all other graces. The preciousness of faith is that is unfeigned; and of love, to be without dissimulation. Thus the odiousness of sin is, when they are committed in hypocrisy, David aggravates the sin of those jeering companions who made him their table talk, and could not taste their cheer except seasoned with some salt jest quibbled out at him, with this, that they were 'hypocritical mockers,' Psa. xxxv. 16; they did it slily, and wrapped up their scoffs, it is like, in such language as might make some think, who did not well observe them, that they applauded him. There is a way of commending, which some have learned to use, when they mean to cast the greatest scorn upon those they hate bitterly, and these hypocritical mockers deserve the chair to be given them from all other scorners. Fevers are counted malignant, according to the degree of putrefaction that is in them. Hypocrisy is the very putrefaction and rottenness of the heart; the more of this putrid stuff there is in any sin, the more malignant it is. David speaks of the iniquity of his sin,' Psa. xxxii. 5: 'I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' This sin seems very probably to have been his adultery with Bathsheba, and murder of Uriah, by his long 'keeping silence,' ver. 3: by the pardon he had immediately given in upon confessing, ver. 5, which we know Nathan delivered to him; and by his further purpose to continue confessing of it, which appeared by the mournful Psalm li. that followed upon his discourse with Nathan. Now David, to make the pardoning mercy of God more illustrious, saith, he did not

Digitized by Google

only forgive his sin, but the iniquity of his sin; and what was that? surely the worst that can be said of that his complicated sin is, that there was so much hypocrisy in it, he wofully juggled with God and man in it; this I do not doubt to say, was the iniquity of his sin, and put a colour deeper on it than the blood which he shed. And the rather, I lay the accent there, because God himself, when he would set out the heinousness of this sin, seems to do it rather from the hypocrisy in the fact, than the fact itself, as appears by the testimony given this holy man, 1 Kings xv. 5: 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' Were there not other false steps that David took besides this? Doth the Spirit of God, by excepting this, declare his approbation of all that else he ever did? No, sure, the Spirit of God records other sins that escaped this eminent servant of the Lord: but all those are drowned here, and this mentioned as the only stain of his life. But why? surely because there appeared less sincerity, yea, more hypocrisy in this one sin, than in all his others put together; though David in them was wrong as to the matter of his actions, yet his heart was more right in the manner of committing them. But here his sincerity was sadly wounded, though not to the total destruction of the habit, yet to lay it in a long swoon, as to any actings thereof. And truly the wound went very deep, when that grace was stabbed, in which did run the life-blood of all the rest. We see then God hath reason, though his mercy prompted him, yea his covenant obliged him, not to let his child die of this wound,—I mean, finally miscarry of this sin, either through want of repentance on the one hand, or pardoning mercy on the other, —so to heal it, that a scar might remain upon the place, a mark upon the sin, whereby others might know how odious hypocrisy is to God.

Thirdly, Those considerations which may seem at first to lessen and pare off something from the heinousness of the hypocrite's sin, viz., that he walks in a religious habit, hath a form of piety which others want, performs duties that others neglect; these and the like are so far from taking from, that they add a further weight of aggravation to it. Let us consider the hypocrite in a twofold respect, and this will appear either in the things he trades about; or, secondly, in the things he lays claim to: these are both high and sacred; and a sin in these can be no ordinary sin. The things he trades in, are duties of God's worship; the things he lays claim to, are relation to God, interest in Christ, consolations of the Spirit, and the like; these are things of high price; a miscarriage about these must be somewhat suitable their high nature. As is the wool, so the thread and cloth, coarse or fine. The profane person pretends not to these; he cannot spin so fine a thread, because the work he deals in is coarser; all his impieties will not have so high price of wrath set upon them, which he hath, being ignorant of God, and a stranger to the ways of God, committed, as the hypocrite's.

Section I.—First, The hypocrite trades in the duties of God's worship. Judas sits down with the rest of the apostles at the passover, and bids himself welcome, as confidently as if he were the best guest, the holiest of all the company. The proud Pharisee gets to the temple as soon as the broken-hearted publican: but what work doth the hypocrite make with these things? that would be known indeed. Sad work, the Lord knows, or else God would not so abominate them, as to think he hears a dog bark, or a wolf howl, all the while they are praying. We think David had a curious hand at the harp, that could pacify the evil, raging spirit of melancholy Saul; but what a harsh, unhappy stroke have they in the duties of God's worship, that are able to make the sweet, meek Spirit of God angry, yea, break out into fury against them! And no wonder if we consider but these two things.

First, The hypocrite does no less than mock God in all his duties, and of all things God can least bear that; 'God will not be mocked.' Christ preached this doctrine when he cursed the fig-tree, which did by her green leaves mock the passenger, making him come for fruit, and go away without any: had it wanted leaves as well as fruit, it had escaped that curse. Every lie is a mocking of him to whom it is told; because such a one goes to cheat him, and thereby puts the fool upon him. 'Why hast thou mocked me,' said Delilah to Samson, 'and told me lies?' Judg. xvi. 10: as if she had said, as is usual upon the like

Digitized by Google

with us, Do you make a fool of me? I leave it to the hypocrite to think seriously what he is going to make of God, when he puts up his hypocritical services. God's command was, none should 'appear before him empty;' this the hypocrite doth, and therefore mocks God; he comes indeed full-mouthed, but empty-hearted. As to the formality of a duty, he oft exceeds the sincere Christian; he, if any, may truly be called a 'master of ceremonies,' because all that he entertains God with in duty, lies in the courtship of his tongue and knee. How abhorrent this is to God, may easily be judged by the disdain which even a wise man would express to be so served; better to pretend no kindness, than, pretending, to intend none. It is the heart God looks at in duty: if the wine be good, he can drink it out of a wooden cup; but let the cup be never so gilded, and no wine in it, he makes account that man mocks him that would put it into his hand. It was Christ's charge against Sardis, Rev. iii. 2, 'I have not found thy works perfect before God;' I have not found them 'full before God,' as the original hath it. Sincerity fills our duty, and all our actions; and mark that phrase, 'before God,' which implies that this church retained such an outward form of devotion, as might keep up her credit before men; she had a name to live, but her works were not full before God: he pierced them deeper than man's prob could go, and judged her by what he found her within.

Secondly, The hypocrite performs the duties of God's worship on some base design or other, and this makes him yet more abominable to God, who disdains to have his holy ordinances prostituted to serve the hypocrite's lust, used only as a stream to turn about his mill, and handsomely effect his carnal projects. When Absalom had formed his plot, within his own natural bosom, and was big with his treason, as ever cockatrice was with her poisonous egg, to Hebron he goes in all haste, and that, forsooth, to pay an old vow, which in the time of his affliction he had made to the Lord, 2 Sam. xv. 10, 11. Who would not think the man was grown honest, when he begins to think of paying his old debts? but the wretch meant nothing less; his errand thither was to lay his treason under the warm wing of religion, that the reputation he should gain thereby might help the sooner to hatch it. And I wish that as Absalom died without a son to keep his name in remembrance, so that none had been left behind to inherit his cursed hypocrisy, that the world might have grown into a happy ignorance of so monstrous a sin; but, alas, this is but a vain wish, *vivit, imo in templum venit*, this kind of hypocrisy yet lives, yea, comes as boldly to outface God in his worship as ever; many making no better use of the exercise of it, than some do of their sedans, to carry them unseen to the enjoyment of their lust. And is it any wonder that God, who hath appointed his ordinances for such high and holy ends, should abhor the hypocrite, who thus debaseth them in the service of the devil? Did you invite some to a costly feast at your house, who, instead of feeding on the dainties you have provided for then, should take and throw all to their dogs under the table, how would you like your guest? The hypocrite is he who casts God's holy things to his dogs. God invites us to his ordinances, as to a rich feast, where he is ready to entertain us, in sweet communion with himself; what horrid impiety is it then that the hypocrite commits, who, when he is set at God's table, feeds not of these dainties himself, but throws all to his lusts, some to his pride, and some to his covetousness; propounding to himself no other end in coming to them, than to make provision for these lusts, as Hamor and Shechem his son, who, when they would persuade the people of their city to submit to circumcision, used this as the great argument to move them, that they should grow rich by the hand: 'If every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised, shall not their cattle and their substance, and every beast of theirs, be ours?' Gen. xxxiv. 21, 22. A goodly argument, was it not, in a business of such a high nature, as coming under a solemn ordinance? they rather speak as if they were going to a horse-market, or cow-fair, than to a religious duty. Truly, though most hypocrites have more wit than thus to print their thoughts, and let the world read what is writ in their hearts, yet as Queen Mary said of Calais, if she were opened, it would be found on her heart; so some such low things as vain-glory, worldly profit, &c., would be found engraven in the breast of all hypocrites, as that which they most aim at in the duties of religon.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.—Secondly, Consider the hypocrite in the things he lays claim to, and they are no small privileges—relation to God, interest in Christ; who more forward to saint himself, to pretend to the graces and comforts of the Spirit, than the hypocrite? As we see in the Pharisees, whose great design was to get a name, and that not such as the great ones of the earth have for prowess, worldly majesty, and the like, but for sanctity and holiness; and they had it, if it would do them any good. 'Verily,' saith Christ, 'they have their reward,' Matt. vi. 2. They would be taken for great saints, and so they are by the multitude, who did so applaud them for their holiness, which faced their outside, that they had a proverb, 'If but two could be saved, one of the two should be a Pharisee.' We read of some that 'profess they know God, but in works they deny him,' Tit. i. 16. They boldly brag of their acquaintance with God, and would be thought great favourites of his, though their lives are antipodes to heaven: so Rev. iii. 9, we meet with some 'that say they are Jews, and are not, but lie.' They dwell surely by ill neighbours, none would say so much for them but themselves: the hypocrite is so ambitious to pass for a saint, that he commonly is a greater censurer of the true graces of others, as too much hindering the prospect of his own: like Herod, who, as Eusebius writes, being troubled at the baseness of his own birth, burnt the Jews' ancient genealogies, the better to defend his own pretended noble descent. Who now is able to give a full accent to this high-climbing sin of hypocrisy? It is a sin that highly reproacheth God, to have such a vile wretch claim kindred with him. Christ indeed is not ashamed to call the poorest saints brethren, but he disdains to have his name seen upon a rotten-hearted hypocrite, as princes to have their effigies stamped on base metals; what scorn was put upon that mock prince, Perkin Warbeck, who, having got some fragments of courtiership, and tutored how to act his part, was presented to the world as son to Edward the Fourth of this nation; but when he had aped awhile the state of a prince, was taken, and with his base, ignoble pedigree, writ in great letters, pinned at his back, sent about, that wherever he came he might carry his shame with him, till in the end he was sent to act the last part of his play at the gallows! But what is all this to the hypocrite's portion, who for abusing others here with a seeming sanctity, as if indeed he was of heavenly extraction, a child of God, and a heir of glory, shall be brought at the great day to be hissed at by men and angels, and after he hath been put to this open shame, be thrown deepest into hell! Of all sinners he doth most mischief in this world, and therefore shall have most torment in the other. There is a double mischief which none stand at like advantage to do, as the hypocrite by his seeming saintship. The one he doth while his credit holds, and he passeth for a child of God in the opinion of his neighbours; the other, when his reputation is cracked, and he discovered to be what he is, a hypocrite. The mischief he doth when his mask is on, is as a deceiver: Machiavel knew what he did in commending to princes a resemblance of religion, though he forbade any more. It hath been found the most taking bait to decoy people into their snare, who come in apace when religion is the flag that is set up. Ehud could not have thought of a surer key to open all doors, and procure him admittance into king Eglon's presence, than to give out he had a message from the Lord to him; this raised such an expectation, and bred such a confidence, that room is made for him; presently all depart, and he left alone with the king: yea, the king will rise to hear this message that comes from the Lord, and so gives him a greater advantage to stab him. Had not some in our days pretended highly to saintship, I doubt not but they would have found the door shut where now they have too much welcome, and find it easy to procure belief to their errors. Even the elect are in some danger, when one cried up for a saint is the messenger that brings the error to town, and that under the notion of a message from God. I confess the hypocrite acts his part so handsomely, that he may do some good accidentally; his glistering profession, heavenly discourse, excellent gifts in prayer or preaching, may affect much the sincere soul, and be an occasion of real good to him; as the stage-player, though his tears be counterfeit, may stir up, by his seeming passion, real sorrow in his spectators, so as to make them weep in earnest; thus the hypocrite, acting his part with false affections, may be a means to draw forth and excite the Christian's true graces; but then is such a one much more in danger to be ensnared

Digitized by Google

by his error, because he will not readily be suspicious of anything that he brings, whom he hath found really helpful to his grace or comfort; and thus the good the hypocrite doth makes him but able to do the greater hurt in the end. Sisera had better have gone without Jael's butter and milk, than by them to be laid asleep against she came with her nail: and it had been far happier for many in our days not to have tasted of the gifts and seeming graces of some, than to have been so taken with this sweet wine, as to drink themselves drunk into an admiration of their persons, which hath laid them asleep, and thereby given them whom they have applauded so much but advantage the more easily to fasten their nail to their heads, errors I mean, to their judgments. The other mischief the hypocrite doth, is, when discovered, and that is as he is a scandal to the ways of God and servants of God. It is said of Samson, 'The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life,' Judges xiv. 30. Truly the hypocrite doth more hurt when he is discovered, which is the death of his profession, than when he seemed to be alive. The wicked worldlings, that are not long seeking a staff to beat the saints with, have now one put into their hands by the hypocrite. O how they can run division upon this harsh note, and besmear the face of all professors with the dirt they see upon one false brother's coat! as if they could take the length of all their feet by the measure of one hypocrite; hence comes such base language as this: They are all of a pack, not one better than another. Indeed, this is very absurd reasoning, as if one should say no coin were current and right silver, because now and then a brass shilling is found amongst the rest: but this language fits the mouth of the ungodly world, and woe be to the man that makes these arrows for them by his hypocrisy, which they shoot against the saints; better he had been thrown with a millstone about his neck into the sea, than have lived to give such an occasion for the enemy to blaspheme.

CHAPTER X.

WHERE ALL ARE STIRRED UP TO PUT THEMSELVES UPON THE TRIAL, WHETHER SINCERE OR NOT; THREE ARGUMENTS USED TO PROVOKE TO THE WORK; AND FOUR FALSE CHARACTERS BY WHICH THE HYPOCRITE FLATTERS HIMSELF INTO A CONCEIT OF BEING UPRIGHT.

Use 2. SECONDLY, Doth sincerity cover all a saint's infirmities? This shews how needful it is for every one to try his ways, and search narrowly his heart whether he be sincere or hypocritical.

SECTION I.—First, All depends on it, even all thou art worth in another world; it is thy making or marring for ever: Psa. cxxv. 5, 'Do good, O Lord, to them that are upright in heart; as for such as turn aside to crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity;' that is the end the hypocrite is sure to come to; he would indeed then fain pass for a saint, and crowd in among the godly, but God 'shall lead him forth with workers of iniquity,'—company that better befits him: it is sincerity shall carry it in that day. 'I will come,' saith Paul, 1 Cor. iv. 19, 'to you shortly, and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up, but the power; for the kingdom of God is not in word, but power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love?' O friends, not Paul, but Christ will shortly come unto us, and he will know the speech and soothing language of such as are puffed up with an empty name of profession, but will know the power, gauge the heart, and see what is in it. Now, will ye that he come with a rod, or in love? to judge you as hypocrites, or to give you the *Euge* of a faithful servant? Doth not he spend his time ill, that takes pains in his trade, and lays out all his stock on such commodity which when he opens his stall will be seized for false ware, and he clapped up for abusing the country? All that ever the hypocrite did will in the great day of Christ be found counterfeit, and he sure to be laid by the heels in hell, for going about to cheat God and man; every man's works shall then be manifest, that day shall declare it. Even the sincere Christian, where he hath tampered with hypocrisy, shall lose his work; but the hypocrite with his work his soul also.

Secondly, Consider, hypocrisy lies close in the heart; if thou art not very

Digitized by Google

careful, thou mayest easily pass a false judgment on thyself; they who were sent to search the cellar under the parliament, at first saw nothing but coals and winter provision, but upon a review, when they came to throw away that stuff, they found all but provision for the devil's kitchen; then the mystery of iniquity was uncased, and the barrels of powder appeared. How many are there, that from some duties of piety they perform, some seeming zeal they express in profession, presently cry, *Omnia bene*, and are so kind to themselves as to vote themselves good Christians, who, did they but take the pains to throw these aside, they might find a foul hypocrite at the bottom of them all; hypocrisy often takes up her lodging next door to sincerity, and so she passes unfound, the soul not suspecting hell can be so near heaven. And as hypocrisy, so sincerity is hard to be discovered; this grace often lies low in the heart, like the sweet violet in some valley, or near some brook, hid with thorns and nettles, infirmities I mean: so that there requires both care and wisdom that we neither let the weed of hypocrisy stand, nor pluck up the herb of grace in its stead.

Thirdly, It is feasible; I do not set you about an endless work. The heart of man, I confess, is as a ruffled skein of silk, not easily unravelled, yet with a faithful use of the means, it may be disentangled, and wound up on the right bottom of sincerity or hypocrisy. Job, when Satan and his cruel friends laboured to roil his spirit most, and muddy the stream of his former course and condition, by throwing their objections as so many stones into it, yet he could see this precious gem at the bottom, sparkling most brightly; yea, Hezekiah, in the very brim of the grave, recreates his spirit with it. Indeed, friends, this is a soul's encouragement, that it shall not want God's help in this search, if it goes about it with honest desires. A justice will not only give his warrant to search a suspicious house, but if need be, will command others to be aiding to him in the business: word, ministers, Spirit, all thou shalt have for thy assistance in this work; only have a care thou dost not mock God in the business: that soul deserves to be damned to this sin, who in the search for hypocrisy, plays the hypocrite; like a naughty, dishonest constable, that willingly overlooks him whom he searches for, and then says he cannot find him.

Now, for the fuller satisfaction in this point, and help in the trial, because it is that which both good and bad are mistaken in; the carnal wretch flattering himself his heart is good and honest; the sincere soul kept under fear of being a hypocrite; Satan abusing them both; I shall therefore first lay down the grounds of a hypocrite, with which he shores up his rotton house, and shew the falsities of them. Secondly, I will lay down the grounds of the weak Christian's fear for his being a hypocrite, and the weakness of them. Thirdly, Some positive discoveries of sincerity, which no hypocrite ever did, or can reach to.

SECTION II.—First, For the hypocrite, he will stand upon his defence; his heart is sincere: well how will he prove it?

First, The hypocrite will say, Sure I am no hypocrite, for I cannot endure it in another.

Ans. This if not enough to clear thee from being a hypocrite, except thou canst shew thou dost this from a holy ground. Jehu, that asked Jehonadab whether his heart was right, carried at that same time a false one in his own breast. It is very ordinary for a man to decry that in another, and smartly to declaim against it, which he all the while harbours himself. How severe was Judah against Tamar! he commands in all haste to burn her, Gen. xxxviii. 24; who would not have thought this man to be chaste? yet he was the very person that had defiled her. There may be a great cheat in this piece of zeal; sometimes the very place a man is in may carry him as the *primum mobile* does the stars in a direction to which his own genius and liking would never lead him. Thus many that are magistrates give the law to drunkards and swearers, merely to keep the decorum of their place, and shun the clamour that would arise from their neglect, who can possibly do both, when they meet with place and company fit for their purpose. Some, their zeal against another's sin is kindled at at the disgrace which reflects upon them by it, in the eye of the world; and this falls out, when the sin is public, and the person that committed it stands related; this is conceived to be Judah's case, who was willing his daughter should be

Digitized by Google

taken out of the way, that the blot which she had brought upon his family might with her be out of sight. Some again find it a thriving trade, and make this advantage of inveighing against others' faults, to hide their own the better, that they may carry on their own designs with less suspicion. Absalom asperseth his father's government, as a stirrup to help himself into the saddle. Jehu loved the crown more than he hated Jezebel's whoredoms, for all his loud cry against them. In a word (for it is impossible to hit all), there may be much of revenge in it, and the person is rather shot at, than his sin; this was observed of Antony's zeal against Augustus, *Odit tyrannum, amavit tyrannidem;* he hated the tyrant, but loved well enough the tyranny.

Secondly, Saith the hypocrite, I am bold and fearless in dangers, sure I am no hypocrite: 'Fearfulness surpriseth the hypocrite:' but it is 'the righteous that is bold as a lion.'

Ans. The better way sure, were to try thy boldness by thy sincerity, than to conclude thy sincerity by thy boldness. Truly, confidence, and a spirit undaunted at death and danger, are glorious things, when the Spirit and word of Christ stand by to vouch them, when the creature can give some account of the hope that is in him, as Paul, who shews how he came by it. This is Christian (not Roman) courage, Rom. v. 1—4; many rooms he passeth before he comes to this, which indeed joins upon heaven itself; faith is the key which lets him into all. First, it opens the door of justification, and lets it into a state of peace, and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ; 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' ver. 1: through this he passeth on to another, the presence-chamber of God's favour, and is admitted nigh unto him, as a traitor once pardoned is; 'By whom also we have access by him into this grace wherein we stand,' ver. 2; that is, we have not only our sins pardoned, and our persons reconciled to God by faith in Christ, but now under Christ's wing, we are brought to court as it were, and stand in his grace as favourites before their prince: this opens into a third, and 'rejoice in the hope of glory;' we do not only at present enjoy the grace and favour of God, and communion with him here, but have from this a hope firmly planted in our hearts for heaven's glory hereafter. Now he is brought to the most inward room of all, which none can come at, but he that goes through all the former, ver. 3: 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also.' If thou hast not entered at these doors, thou art a thief and a robber; thou gettest thy confidence too quickly to have it brought to thy hand by God; if God means thee well for eternity, he will make thee smart for this thy boldness, as he did Jacob for stealing his father's blessing; and therefore content not thyself with bare boldness and confidence in dangers, but inquire whether it hath a Scripture bottom and basis to stand on, or whether the pillars supporting it be not ignorance in thy mind, and stupidity in thy conscience: if the latter, thou art in a sad condition; thy boldness will last no longer than thou seest it doth in one that is drunk, who, when he is wine-sprung, thinks, as they say, he can skip over the moon, and venture to go without fear upon precipices and pit-falls; but when sober, trembles to see what he did in his drunken fit. Nabal, that feared nothing when drunk, his heart died within him, and became as a stone, at the story Abigail told him in the morning, when the wine was gone out of him, 1 Sam. xxv. 37. Therefore as he, when his cause miscarried, through the sleepiness of the judge on the bench, 'appealed from the judge asleep to the judge awake,' so do I here with you, that through the present stupidity of conveniences are bold and fearless of death, and from this plead your uprightness. I appeal from your conscience asleep, to the sentence it will give when it shall be awake: which I wish may be in this world, that you may see your mistake where you may amend it.

Thirdly, Sure, saith another, I am no hypocrite, for I perform secret duties in my closet: the hypocrite he is nobody, except on the stage; it is the brand of the hypocrite, he courts the world for its applause, and therefore does all abroad.

Ans. Though the total neglect of secret duties in religion speaks a person to be a hypocrite, yet the performing of duties in secret will not demonstrate thee a sincere person; hypocrisy is in this like the frogs brought on Egypt, no place was free of them, no, not their bed-chambers; they crept into their most

Digitized by Google

inward room, and so doth hypocrisy into closet-duties, as well as public; indeed, though the place be secret where such duties are performed, yet the matter may be so handled, and is by some hypocrites, that they are not secret in their closets: like the hen who goes into a secret place to lay her egg, but, by her cackling, tells all the house where she is, and what she is doing. But where this is not, it is not enough; for we must not think but some hypocrites may and do spin a thread finer than others; in all arts there are some exceed others, and so in this trade of hypocrisy; the gross hypocrite, whose drift is to deceive others, his religion commonly is all without doors; but there is a hypocrite that labours to keep a fair quarter with himself, and is very desirous to make conscience on his side, which to procure, he will go to the utmost link of his chain, and do anything that may not separate him and his beloved lusts; now secret prayer, and other duties, may be so performed, as that they shall not more prejudice a man's lusts than any other: it is not the sword, though very sharp, that kills, but the force that it is thrust withal; indeed, there are some secret duties, as examination of our hearts, trying of our ways, and serious meditation of the threatenings of the word against such sins as we find in our own bosoms, with close application of them to ourselves, would put sin hard to it; but the hypocrite can lay this sword so easily and favourably on, that his lusts shall not cry 'Oh' at it; therefore still there needs a *melius inquirendum*, a fuller search before thou canst come off.

Fourthly, Surely I am not a hypocrite, for I do not only pray, and that in secret too, against my sins, but I also fight against them, yea, and that to good purpose: for I can shew you the spoils of my victories that I have got over some of them. There was a time I could not go by the alehouse, but my lust bid me stand, and pulled me in; but now, I thank God, I have got such a mastery of my drunken lust, that I can pass by without looking in.

Ans. It is good what thou dost say, and I wish all thy drunken neighbours could speak as much, that when the magistrate will not, or cannot spoil that drunken trade, they that keep those shops for the devil might even shut up their windows for want of customers. But is it not pity, that what is good should be marred in the doing? yet it is too common, and may be thy case.

First, Let me ask thee, how long it hath been thus with thee? Lusts (as to the actings, I mean) are like agues, the fit is not always on, and yet the man not rid of his disease; and some men's lusts, like some agues, have not such quick returns as others. The river doth not move always one way, now it is coming, anon falling water; and though it doth not rise when it falls, yet it hath not lost its other motion. Now the tide of lust is up, and anon it is down, and the man recoils, and seems to run from it; but it returns again upon him. Who would have thought to have seen Pharaoh in his mad fit again, that should have been with him in his good mood, when he bid Moses and the people go? But, alas! the man was not altered: thus may be when a strong occasion comes, this, like an easterly wind to some of our ports, will bring in the tide of thy lust so strongly, that thy soul, that seemed as clear of thy lust as the naked sands are of water, will be in a few moments covered, and as deep under their waves as ever. But the longer the banks have held the better: yet shouldst thou never more be drunk as to the outward fulfilling of the lust, yet this is not enough to clear thee from being a hypocrite.

Secondly, Therefore let me ask thee, what was the great motive to take thee off? That may be as bad, in some sense, which keeps thee from the alehouse now, as that which heretofore drew thee to it. It is ordinary for one lust to spoil another's market: he that should save his money from drinking it, to lay on more finery on his back; what doth this man do, but rob one lust to sacrifice it to another? Whether was it, God or man, God or thy purse, God or thy pride, God or thy reputation, that knocked thee off? If any but God prevailed with thee, hypocrite is a name will better now become thee, than when in the alehouse. Again, if God, what apprehensions of God were they that did it? Some, the wrath of God for some particular sin hath so shaked, (that as one scared with an apparition in a room, will not lie there any more), so they dare not, at least for a long time, be acquainted with that practice again: and as it is not the room, but the apparition, that the one dislikes; so not the sin, but the wrath of God that haunts it, which the other flees from. In

Digitized by Google

a word, may be thou hast laid down this sinful practice; but didst thou hate it, and love God, and so leave it? Thou art become strange to one, have you not got acquaintance with any other in the room of it? Thou hast laid down the commission of an evil, but hast thou taken up thy known duty? He is a bad husbandman that drains his ground, and then neither sows nor plants it? It is all one if it had been under water, as drained and not improved. What if thou cease to do evil, if it were possible, and thou learn not to do well? It is not thy fields being clear of weeds, but fruitful in corn, that pays thy rent, and brings thee in thy profit; nor thy not being drunken, unclean, or any other sin, but thy being holy, gracious, thy having faith unfeigned, pure love, and the other graces, which will prove thee sound, and bring in evidence for thy interest in Christ, and through him of heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEAK GROUNDS WHEREBY TEMPTED SOULS ARGUE AGAINST THEIR OWN UPRIGHTNESS.

We proceed to the false grounds from which sincere souls do many times go about to prove themselves hypocrites, yea, for a while conclude they are such.

First, Sure I am a hypocrite, saith the poor soul, or else I should not be as I am; God would not thus follow me on with one blow after another, and suffer Satan also to use me as he doth. This was the grand battery Job's friends had against his sincerity; and sometimes Satan so far prevails, as to make the sincere soul set it against his own breast, saying, much like him, 'If God be with us, why is all this befallen us?' If God be in us by his grace, why appears he against us?

Ans. This fire into which God casts thee proves thou hast dross! and if, because, thou art held long in the furnace, thou shouldst say, thou hadst much dross. I would not oppose; but how thou shouldst spell hypocrite out of thy afflictions and troubles I marvel; the wicked indeed make much use of this argument to clap hypocrite on them: but the Christian methinks should not use it against himself; though the barbarians presently gave their verdict upon the sight of the viper on Paul's hand, that he was a murderer, yet Paul thought no worse of himself for it. Christian, give but the same counsel to thyself, when in affliction and temptation, that thou usest to do to thy fellow-brethren in the same condition, and thou wilt get out of the snare; darest thou think thy neighbour a hypocrite, merely from the hand of God upon him? no, I warrant thee, thou rather pitiest him, and helpest him to answer the doubts that arise in his spirit from this very agument. It would make one smile to see how handsomely and roundly a Christian can untie the knots and scruples of another, who afterward, when brought into the like condition, is troubled with the same himself; he that helped his friend over the stile is now unable to stride it himself; God so orders things that we should need one another. She that is midwife to others, cannot well do that office to herself; nor he that is the messenger to bring peace to the spirit of another, able to speak it to his own: the case is clear, Christian; affliction cannot prove thee a hypocrite, which, wert thou without altogether, thou mightest safer think thou wert a bastard; the case I say is clear, but thine eyes are held for some further end God hath to bring about by thy affliction. But may be thou wilt say, it is not simply the affliction makes thee think thus of thyself; but because thou art so long afflicted, and in the dark also, as to any sense of God's love in thy soul. Thou hast no smiles from God's sweet countenance to alleviate thy affliction; and if all were right, and thou a sincere child of God, would thy heavenly Father let thee lie groaning, and never look in upon thee, to lighten thy affliction with his sweet presence? As to the first of these, the length of thy affliction, I know no standard God hath set for to measure the length of his saints' crosses by; and it becomes not us to make one ourselves; which we do, when we thus limit his chastisements to time, that if they exceed the day we have written down in our thoughts, which is like to be short enough, if our hasty hearts may appoint, then we are hypocrites. For the other, thou must know, God can, without any impeachment to his love, hide it for a while; and truly he may take it very ill, that his children, who have security enough given them for his loving them, besides the sensible manifestation

Digitized by Google

of it to their souls, should call this in question, for not coming to visit them, and take them up in his arms, when they would have him; in a word, may be thy affliction comes in the nature of purging physic; God intends to evacuate some corruption by it, which endangers thy spiritual health, and hinders thy thriving in godliness. Now the manifestation of his love God may reserve, as the physicians do their cordials, to be given when the physic is over.

Secondly, I fear I am a hypocrite, saith the tempted soul; why else are there such decays and declensions to be found in me? It is the character of the upright that he goes from strength to strength, but I go backward from strength to weakness. Some Christians are like those that we call close men in the world; if they lose anything in their trade, and all goes not as they would have it, we are sure to hear of that over and over again; they speak of their losses in every company; but when they make a good market, and gains come in apace, they keep this to themselves, not forward to speak of them. If Christians would be ingenuous, they should tell what they get, as what they lose. But taking it for granted that thou dost find a decay, we direct our answer to it.

Ans. 1. I grant it as true, that the sincere soul grows stronger and stronger; but how? Even as the tree grows higher and bigger, which we know meets with a fall of the leaf, and winter, that for a while intermits its growth; thus the sincere soul may be put to a present stand by some temptation, as Peter, who was far from growing stronger when he fell from professing to denying, from denying Christ to swearing and cursing if he knew him; yet as the tree, when spring comes, revives and gains more in the summer than it loseth in the winter, so doth the sincere soul, as we see in Peter, whose grace, that squatted in for a while, came forth with such a force, that no cruelty from men could drive it in ever after: shaking temptations end in settlement, according to the apostle's prayer, 1 Pet. v. 10: 'The God of all grace, after ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.'

2. There is great difference between the decay of a sincere soul, and of a hypocrite. The hypocrite declines out of an inward dislike of the ways of God; hence they are called 'backsliders in heart,' Prov. xiv. 14. So long as they served his lust, and contributed any help to the obtaining his worldly interest, so long he had a seeming zeal; but that argument taken away, he begins to remit by degrees, till he comes to be key-cold, yea, as heartily sick of his profession as Amnon of Tamar; when the hypocrite begins to fall, he goes apace, like a stone down the hill, knows no ground but the botom. Now speak freely, poor soul, darest thou say that there is an inward dislike to the ways of God? May be thou dost pray not with that heat and fervency which thou hast, but is it because thou dost not like the duty as formerly? Thou dost not hear the word with such joy, but dost thou therefore hear it with more sorrow? In a word, canst thou not say with the spouse, 'When thou sleepest, thy heart waketh,' Cant. v. 2; that is, thou art not pleased with thy present declining state, but heartily wishest thou wert out of it; as one that hath a great desire to rise and be at his work, his heart is awake, but he is not able at present to shake off that sleep which binds him down; this will clear thee from being a hypocrite.

Thirdly, I fear, saith the poor soul, I am a hypocrite, because I have such a divided heart in the duties I perform; I cannot for my life enjoy any privacy with God in duty, but some base lust will be crowding into my thoughts when I am at prayer, hearing of the word, or meditating: now I am lifted up with a self-applauding thought, anon cast down to the earth with a worldly thought: what with one and another, little respite have I from such company. And do such vermin breed anywhere but in the dunghill of a false hypocritical heart?

Answ. Woe were it to the best saints, if the mere rising and stirring of such thoughts as these, or worse than these, did prove the heart unsound; take heed thou concludest not thy state therefore from the presence of these in thee, but from the comportment and behaviour of thy heart towards them. Answer therefore to these few interrogatories, and possibly thou mayest see thy sincerity through the mist these have raised in thy soul.

First, What friendly welcome have such thoughts with thee, when they present themselves to thee in duty? Are these the guests thou hast expected,

Digitized by Google

and trimmed thy room for? Didst go to duty to meet those friends, or do they unmannerly break in upon thee, and forcibly carry thee, as Christ foretold of Peter in another case, whither thou wouldst not? If so, why shouldst thou bring thy sincerity into dispute? Dost thou not know the devil is a bold intruder, and dares come where he knows there is none will bid him sit down, and that soul alone he can call his own house where he finds rest? Luke xii. 24. Suppose in your family, as you are kneeling down to prayer, a company of rioters should stand under your window, and all the while you are praying they would be roaring and hallooing, this could not but much disturb you; but would you, from the disturbance they make, fall to question your sincerity in the duty? Truly, it is all one, whether the disturbance be in the room, or in the bosom, so the soul likes the one no more than he doth the other.

Secondly, Dost thou sit contented with this company, or use all the means thou canst to get rid of them, as soon as may be? Sincerity cannot sit still to see such doings in the soul, but as a faithful servant, when thieves break into his master's house, though overpowered with their strength and multitude, that he cannot with his own hands thrust them out of doors, yet he will send out secretly for help, and raise the town upon them: prayer is the sincere soul's messenger, it posts to heaven with full speed in this case, counting itself to be no other than in the belly of hell with Jonah while it is yoked with such thoughts, and as glad when aid comes to rescue him out of their hands as Lot was when Abraham recovered him from the kings that had carried him away prisoner.

Fourthly, But may be thou wilt say, though thou darest not deny that thy cry is sent to heaven against them, yet thou hearest no news of the prayer, but continuest still pestered with them as before, which increaseth thy fear that thy heart is naught, or else thy prayer would have been answered, and thou delivered from these inmates.

Ans. Paul might as well have said so, when he besought the Lord thrice, but could not have the thorn in his flesh plucked out, 2 Cor. xii. 8. He doth not by this shew thee to be a hypocrite, but gives thee a fair advantage of proving thyself sincere; not much unlike his dealings with the Israelites, before whom he did not, as they expected, hastily drive out the nations, but left them as thorns in their sides, and why? hear the reason from God's own mouth, Judges ii. 22: 'That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk therein as their fathers did keep it, or not.' Thus God leaves these corruptions in thee, to prove whether thou wilt at last fall in and be friends with them, or maintain the conflict with them, and continue praying against them, by which perseverance thou wilt prove thyself to be indeed upright. A false heart will never do this. He is soon answered, that doth not cordially desire the thing he asks. The hypocrite, when he prays against his corruption, goes of his conscience's errand, not his will's; just as a servant that doth not like the message his master sends him about, but dares not displease him, and therefore goes and may be knocks at the man's door whither he is sent, yet very faintly, loth he should hear him; all that he doth is, that he may but bring a fair tail to his master, by saying he was there: even so prays the hypocrite, only to stop the mouth of his conscience with this flam, that he hath prayed against his lust; glad he is when it is over, and more glad that he returns *re infecta*. Observe therefore the behaviour of thy heart in prayer, and judge thyself sincere, or not sincere, by that, not by the present success it hath. God can take it kindly that thou askest, what at present he thinks better to deny than give. Thou wouldst have all thy corruptions knocked down at one blow, and thy heart in a posture to do the work of thy God without any stop or rub from lust within, or devil without; wouldst thou not? God highly approves of your zeal, as he did of David's, who had a mind to build him a temple; but as he thought not fit that the house should in David's time be reared, reserving it for the peaceful reign of Solomon, so neither doth he that this thy request should be granted in this life, having reserved this immunity as an especial part of the charter of the city that is above, which none but glorified saints, who are inhabitants there enjoy: he hath indeed taught us to pray 'Let thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven;' but we must expect the full answer to it when we come there. But learn therefore, poor soul, to take this

Digitized by Google

denial as David did his; because God would not let him build the house in his days, he did not therefore question the love and favour of God, neither did he desist from preparing materials for it, but did what he might towards it, though he might not what he would; far be it from thee also, that thou shouldst for this either cast away thy confidence on God, or lay aside thy endeavour for God, in mortifying thy corruptions, and adding to the store thou hast at present of his graces, which, though now imperfect and unpolished, he will make use of in the heavenly building which he intends thee for, where all the broken pieces, as I may so say, of our weak graces shall be so improved by the power and wisdom of God, that they shall make up one glorious structure of perfect holiness, more to be admired by angels in heaven, for the rare workmanship of it, than Solomon's temple was on earth by men, when in its full glory.

Fifthly, O but, saith the tempted soul, I have sometimes inward checks from my own conscience that this duty I did hypocritically, and in that action there was much falseness of heart discovered itself, and if my heart condemn me, how can it be otherwise, but I must needs be a hypocrite?

Ans. I shall help to resolve this, by laying down two distinctions, and applying them to the case in hand.

First, We must distinguish between conscience proceeding by a right rule in its judgment, and conscience proceeding by a false rule.

Secondly, Between a conscience that goes by a right rule, and is also rightly informed how to use it; and a conscience that judgeth by a right rule, but is not rightly informed in its use. First, to apply the first.

First, Then conscience proceeds by a right rule, when it grounds its charge upon the word of God; for being but an under officer it is bound to lay up a law by which it must proceed: and that can be no other than what God appoints it, who gives it commission, and puts it in office, and that is the word of God, and that only; so that we are to give credit to our consciences, commanding or forbidding, condemning or acquitting us, when it can shew its warrant from the word of God for these; otherwise, as subjects that are wronged in an inferior court, and cannot have justice there, may appeal higher, so may and ought we from conscience to the word of God. And you must know conscience is a faculty that is corrupted as much as any other by nature, and is very often made use of by Satan to deceive both good and bad, godly and ungodly. Many that know their consciences, they say, speak peace to them, will be found merely cheated and gulled when the books shall be opened; no such discharge will then be found entered in the book of the word, as conscience hath put into their hand. And many gracious souls, who passed their days in a continual fear of their spiritual state, and were kept chained in the dark dungeon of a troublesome conscience, shall then be acquitted, and have their action against Satan. for false imprisonment, and accusing their consciences to the disturbing their peace. And now let me ask thee, poor soul, who sayest, thy conscience checks thee for a hypocrite, art thou a convicted hypocrite by the word? doth thy conscience shew thee a word from Christ's law that proves thee so? or rather doth not Satan abuse thy fearfulness, and play upon the tenderness of thy spirit, which is so deeply possessed with the sense of thy sins, that thou art ready to believe any motion in thee, that tells any evil of thee? I am sure it is often so: the fears and checks which some poor souls have in their bosoms, are like those reports that are now and then raised of some great news, by such as have a mind to abuse the country; a talk and murmur you shall have in every man's mouth of it, but go about to follow it to the spring-head, and you can find no ground of it, or author of credit that will vouch it. Thus here, a bruit there is in the tempted Christian's bosom, and a noise heard as it were continually whispering in his ears, 'I am a hypocrite, my heart is naught; all I do is dissembling;' but when the poor creature in earnest sets upon the search, to find out the business, calls his soul to the bar, and falls to examine it upon these interrogatories which the word propounds for trial of our sincerity, he can fasten this charge from none of them all upon himself: and at last comes to find it but a false alarm of hell, given out to put him to some trouble and affrightment for the present, though not hurt him in the end, like the politicians' lie, which, though it be found false at last, yet doth them service the time it is believed for true. As one serious question, such as this, seriously put to a

Digitized by Google

gross hypocrite, is able to make him speechless, What promise in all the Bible hast thou on thy side for salvation? so it is enough to deliver the troubled soul from his fears of being a hypocrite, if he would but, as David, ask his soul a Scripture reason for his disquietment: 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?' The sincere soul hath firm ground for his faith at bottom, however a little dirt is cast by Satan over it, to make him afraid of venturing to set his foot on it.

Secondly, We must distinguish between a conscience rightly informed, and a conscience misinformed. A conscience may be regular, so as to choose the right rule, but not rightly informed how to use this rule in his particular case. Indeed, in the saint's trouble, conscience is full of Scripture sometimes, on which it grounds its verdict, but very ill interpreted. O, saith the poor soul, this place is against me! Psa. xxxii.: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.' Here, saith he, is a description of a sincere soul, to be one in whose spirit there is no guile; but I find much guile in me, therefore I am not the sincere one. Now this is a very weak, yea, false inference. By a spirit without guile is not meant a person that hath not the least deceitfulness and hypocrisy remaining in his heart; this is such a one as none since the fall, but Christ himself, was ever found walking in mortal flesh. To be without sin, and to be without guile, in this strict sense are the same: a prerogative here on earth peculiar to the Lord Christ, 2 Pet. ii. 22, 'Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.' And therefore when we meet with the same phrase attributed to the saints, as to Levi, Mal. ii. 6: 'Iniquity was not found in his lips;' and to Nathaniel, John i. 47: 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile,' we must sense it in an inferior way, that may suit with their imperfect state here below, and not put that which was only Christ's crown on earth, and is the glorified saint's robe in heaven, to wear on the weak Christian while militant on earth, not only with a devil without, but a body of sin within him. Wipe thine eyes again, poor soul, and then if thou readest such places, wherein the Spirit of God speaks so highly and hyperbolically of his saints' grace, thou shalt find he doth not assert the perfection of their grace, free from all mixture of sin, but rather to comfort poor drooping souls, and cross their misgiving hearts, which, from the presence of hypocrisy, are ready to overlook their sincerity as none at all, he expresseth his high esteem of their little grace, by speaking of it as if it were perfect, and their hypocrisy none at all. O Christian! thy God would have thee know that thou dost not more overlook thy little grace for fear of the hypocrisy thou findest mingled with it, than he doth thy great corruptions, for the dear love he bears to the little, yet true grace he sees amidst them. Abraham loved and owned his kinsman Lot when a prisoner, carried away by those heathen kings; so does thy God thy grace, near in blood to him, when sadly yoked by the enemy in thy own bosom: and for thy comfort know, when the books shall be opened, the word, and also that of thy own conscience, in the great day of Christ, Christ will be the interpreter of both: not the sense which thou hast in the distemper of thy troubled soul, when thou readest both with Satan's gloss put upon them shall stand, but what Christ shall say; and to be sure he hath already declared himself so great a friend to weak grace, when on earth, by his loving converse with his disciples, and free testimony he gave to his grace in them, when God knows they were but raw and weak Christians, both as to their knowledge and practice, that, poor soul, thou needst not fear he will then and there condemn what here he commended, and so dearly embraced. Yea, he that took most care for his little lambs how they might be used gently, when he was to go from them to heaven, will not be unkind himself to them at his return.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUR CHARACTERS OF TRUTH OF HEART, OR SINCERITY.

HAVING broke the flattering glasses wherein hypocrites use to look, till they fall in love with their own painted faces, and conceit themselves sincere; as also those which disfigure the sweet countenance and natural beauty of the sincere

Digitized by Google

soul, so as to make it bring the grace of God which shines on it into question; I now proceed to draw a few lineaments, and lay down some undoubted characters of this truth of heart and godly sincerity, whereby we may have the better advantage of stating every one his own condition.

SECTION I.—First, A sincere heart is a new heart; hypocrisy is called the 'old leaven,' 1 Cor. v. 7: 'Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.' Dough once soured with leaven will never lose the taste of it; neither will corrupt nature cease to be hypocritical, till it cease to be corrupt nature; either the heart must be made new, or it will have its old quality; there may be some art used to conceal it, and take away its unsavouriness from others for a while, as flowers and perfumes cast about a rotten carcase may do its scent; yet both the rotten carcase and the corrupt heart remain the same. They say of the peacock, that, roast him as much as you will, yet his flesh, when cold, will be raw again; truly thus let a carnal heart do what it please, force upon itself never such an high strain of seeming piety, so that it appears fire hot with zeal, yet stay a little, and it will come to its old complexion, and discover itself to be but what it was, naught and false; one heart, and a new heart, both are covenant mercies, yea, so promised that the new is promised in order to the making of the heart one, Ezekiel xi. 9: 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit in you, and I will take away the stony heart,' &c. God promiseth he will give them one spirit, that is, a sincere spirit to God and man: contrary to a divided heart, 'a heart and a heart,' the mark of hypocrisy. But how will he give it? he tells them, 'I will give you a new spirit;' and how will he do that? 'I will take away the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh;' upon which words one very well thus glosseth, I will give you 'one heart,' which that I may so do, I will cast it 'anew;' and that I may do this also, I will 'melt and soften it;' as one that having many pieces of old silver and plate lying by him, which he intends to put into one bowl, he first resolves to cast it anew, and to that end throws it into the fire to melt, and so at last shuts up all in one piece. Indeed by nature man's heart is a very divided, broken thing, scattered and parcelled out, a piece to this creature, and a piece to that lust. One while this vanity hires him (as Leah did Jacob of Rachel), anon when he hath done some drudgery for that, he lets out himself to another, thus divided is man and his affections; now, the elect, whom God hath decreed to be vessels of honour, consecrated for his holy use and service, he throws into the fire of his word, that being there softened and melted, he may, by his transforming Spirit, cast them anew, as it were, into a holy oneness; so that he who before was divided from God, and lost among the creatures, and his lusts, that shared him among them, now his heart is gathered into God from them all; it looks with a single eye on God, and acts for him in all that he doth; if therefore thou wouldst know whether thy heart be sincere, inquire whether it be thus made new. Hath God thrown thee into his furnace? Did ever his word, like fire, take hold upon thee, so as to soften thy hard heart, and melt thy drossy spirit, that thou now seest that desparate hypocrisy, pride, unbelief, and the like, which before lay hid, like dross in the metal, before the fire finds it out? And not only seest it, but seest it sever and separate from thy soul, that thou who before didst bless thyself as in a good condition, now bewailest thy folly for it, heartily confessing what an unsavoury creature thou wert to God in all thou didst; the things which appeared so gaudy and fair in thy eye, thy civil righteousness, keeping thy church, slubbering over a few duties in thy family, that for them thou thoughtest heaven was as it were in mortgage to thee; dost thou lament to think how thou didst mock God with these hypocritical pageants abroad, while thy lusts were entertained within doors in thy bosom, there sucking the heart-blood of thy dearest affections? In a word, canst thou say that thou art not only melted into sorrow for these, but that thou findest thy heart, which was so divided and distracted betwixt lusts and creatures, now united to fear the name of God? Hast thou but one design, that above all thou pursuest, and that to approve thyself to God, though with the displeasing of all beside? One love, how thou mayest love Christ, and be beloved of him? If the streams of thy affections be thus, by the mighty power of God renewing thee, gathered into this one channel, and with a sweet violence run this way, then blessed art thou of the Lord; thou art the sincere soul, in his account,

Digitized by Google

though much corruption be found in thee still, that is foiling thy stream, and endeavouring to stop the free course of thy soul Godward: this may put thee to some trouble, as the mountains and rocks do the river-water running to the sea, causing some windings and turnings in its course, which else would go the nearest way, even in a direct line to it; so thy remaining corruptions may now and then put thee out of thy way of obedience; but sincerity will, like the water, on its journey, for all this, and never leave till it bring thee, though with some compass, to thy God, whom thou hast so imprinted in thy heart, as he can never be forgot by thee. But if thou never hadst the hypocrisy of thy heart thus discovered, and made hateful to thee, nor a new principle put into thy bosom, to turn the tide of thy soul contrary on the natural fall of thy affections, only thou from the good opinion which thou hast of thyself, because of some petty flourishes thou makest in profession, takest it for granted thou art sincere, and thy heart true, I dare pronounce thee an unclean hypocrite; the world may saint thee possibly, but thou wilt never, as thou art, be so in God's account; when thou hast tricked and spruced up thyself never so finely into the fashion of a Christian, still thou wilt have but a saint's face, and a hypocrite's heart. It is no matter what is the sign, though an angel that hangs without, if the devil and sin dwell within. New trimmings upon an old garment will not make it new, only give it a new shape; and truly it is no good husbandry to bestow a great deal of cost in fining up an old suit, that will drop in a while to tatters and rags, when a little more might purchase a new one, that is lasting. And is it not better to labour to get a new heart, that all thou dost may be accepted and thou saved, than to lose all the pains thou takest in religion, and thyself also, for want of it?

Section II.—Secondly, A sincere heart is a plain heart, a simple heart, *sine plicis*, a heart without folds. The hypocrite is of the serpent's brood; he can, as the serpent, shrink up, or let out himself for his advantage, unwilling to expose himself much to the knowledge of others; and he has reason to do so, for he knows he hath most credit where he is least known: the hypocrite is one that digs deep to hide his counsel,' Isa. xxix. 15. 'Their heart is deep,' Psa. lxiv. 6. Their meaning and intent of heart lies nobody knows how far distant from their words. A sincere heart is like a clear stream in a brook, you may see to the bottom of his plots in his words, and take the measure of his heart by his tongue. I have heard say, that diseases of the heart are seen in spots of the tongue; but the hypocrite can shew a clear tongue, and yet have a foul heart; he that made that proverb, *Loquere ut te videam*, 'Speak that I may see you,' did not think of the hypocrite, who will speak that you shall not see him: the thickest clouds that he hath to wrap up his villany in, are his religious tongue and sandy profession. Wouldst thou know whether thou hast a true heart in thy bosom? Look if thou hast a plain-dealing heart; see them joined, 2 Cor. i. 12; Paul and the rest of the faithful messengers of Christ had their conversation among the Corinthians in 'simplicity and godly sincerity.' They had no close box in the cabinet of their hearts, in which they cunningly kept anything concealed from them of their designs, as the false apostles did. Now this plain-dealing of the sincere heart appears in these three particulars.

First, A sincere heart deals plainly with itself, and that in two things chiefly.

First, In searching and ransacking its own self; this it doth to its utmost skill and power. It will not be put off with pretences, or such a mannerly excuse as Rachel gave to Laban, when at the same time she sat brooding on his idols. No, an account it will have of the soul, and that such a one as may enable it to give a good account to God, upon whose warrant it does its office. O the fear which such a one shews, lest any lust should escape its eye, and lie hid, as Saul in the stuff, or that any the least grace of God should be trodden on regardlessly by belying or denying it! When David found his thoughts of God, which used to recreate him, and be his most pleasing company, occasion some trouble in his spirit,—Psa. lxxix. 3: 'I thought on God, and was troubled,—this holy man, wondering what the matter should be, do but see what a privy search he makes; he hunts backwards and forwards, what God's former dealings had been, 'and communes with his heart, and makes diligent search there,' ver. 6; never gives over till he brings it to an issue; and finding the disturber of his peace to be in himself, he is not so tender of his reputation, as to think of

Digitized by Google

smothering the business, or smoothing it over; but attaches the thief, indicts his sin, and confesseth the fact, to the justifying of God, whom before he had hard thoughts of: ver. 20, 'And I said, This is my infirmity;' as if he had said, Lord, now I see the Jonah that caused the storm in my bosom, and made me so uncomfortable in my affliction all this while; it is this unbelief of mine, that bowed me down to attend so to the sorrow and sense of my present affliction, that it would not suffer me to look up to former experiences; and so, while I forgat them, I thought unworthily of thee. Here was an honest plain-dealing soul indeed; what akin art thou, O man, to holy David? Is this thy way in searching of thy soul? Dost thou do it in earnest, as if thou wert searching for a murderer hid in thy house; as willing to find out thy sin as ever a Papist in queen Mary's time was to find Protestants, whom to discover they would run their swords and forks into beds and haymows, lest they should be there? Or, when thou goest about this work, art thou loth to look too far, lest thou shouldst see what thou wouldst willingly overlook; or afraid to stay too long, lest conscience should make an unpleasing report to thee? Tertullian said of the heathen persecutors, *Noluerunt audire, quod auditum damnare non possint;* they would not let the Christians be heard, because they could not then easily have had the face to condemn them, their cause would have appeared so just: the contrary here is true, the hypocrite dares not put his state upon a fair trial, because then he could not handsomely escape condemning himself. But the sincere soul is so zealous to know its true state, that when he hath done his utmost himself to find it out, and upon this privy search his conscience clears him, yet he contents not himself here; but jealous lest self-love might blind his eyes, and occasion too favourable a report from his conscience, he calls in help from heaven and puts himself upon God's review: Psa. cxxxix. 21, 'Do not I hate them that hate thee? and am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee?' Ver. 22, his own conscience answers to it: 'I hate them with a perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.' Yet David, not wholly satisfied with his own single testimony, calls out to God, ver. 23, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; see if there be any wicked way in me;' and wise physicians will not trust their own judgments about the state of their own health, nor sincere Christians themselves about their soul's welfare; it is God that they attend to; his judgment alone concludes and determines them; when they have prayed, and opened their case to him, with David they listen what he will say; therefore you shall find them putting themselves under the most searching ministry, from which they never come more pleased than when their consciences are stripped naked, and their hearts exposed to their view, as the woman of Samaria, who commended the sermon, and Christ that preached it, for this, unto her neighbours, 'that he had told her all that ever she had done,' John iv. 29: whereas a false heart likes not to hear of that; he thinks the preacher commits a trespass when he comes upon his ground, and comes up close to his conscience; and if he could he would have an action against him for it. This stuck in Herod's stomach, that John should lay his finger on his sore place; though he feared him, being conscious, yet he never loved him, and therefore was soon persuaded to cut off his head, which had so bold a tongue in it, that durst reprove his incestuous bed.

Secondly, The true heart shows its plain dealing with itself, as in searching so in judging itself, when once testimony comes in clear against it, and conscience tells,—Soul, in this duty thou betrayest pride, in that affliction frowardness and impatience. Such a one is not long before it proceeds to judgment; and this it doth with so much vehemency and severity, that it plainly appears, zeal for God, whom he hath dishonoured, makes him forget all self-pity; he lays about him in humbling and abasing himself, as the sons of Levi in executing justice on their brethren, who 'knew neither brother nor sister' in that act; truly such an heroic act is this of the sincere soul judging itself; he is so transported and clothed with a holy fury against his sin, that he is deaf to the cry of flesh and blood, which would move him to think of a more favourable sentence: 'I have sinned,' saith David, 'against the Lord,' 2 Sam. xii. In another place, 'I have sinned greatly, and done very foolishly,' 2 Sam. xxiv. In a third, he, as unworthy of a man's name, takes beast to himself: 'So foolish was I and ignorant, as a beast before thee,' Psa. lxxiii. 22. But a false heart, if conscience

Digitized by Google

checks him for this or that, and he perceives by this inward murmur in his bosom, which way the cause will go, if he proceeds fairly on to put himself upon the trial, the court is sure to be broke up, and all put off to another hearing, which is like to be at leisure; so that as witnesses, with delays and many put-offs, grow at last weary of the work, and will rather stay at home than make their appearance to little purpose, so conscience ceaseth to give evidence where it cannot be heard, or when heard, can have no judgment against the offender.

Secondly, A true heart is plain as with itself, so with God also. Several ways this might appear; take one for all, and that is in his petitions and requests at the throne of grace: the hypocrite in prayer juggles, he asks what he would not thank God to give him; there is a mystery of iniquity in his praying against iniquity. Now this will appear in these two particulars, whether we be plain-hearted in our requests or not.

First, Observe whether thou art deeply afflicted in spirit when thy request is not answered, or regardest not what success it hath. Suppose it be a sin thou prayest against, or some grace thou prayest for; what is thy temper all the while thy messenger stays, especially if it be long? Thou prayest, and corruption abates not, grace grows not; now thy hypocrisy or sincerity will appear; if sincere, every moment will be an hour, every hour a day, a year, till thou hearest some news from heaven: hope deferred will make the heart sick: doth not the sick man that sends for a physician think long for his coming? O he is afraid his messenger should miss of him, or that he will not come with him, or that he shall die before he brings his physic; a thousand fears disturb him, and make him passionately wish he were there; thus the sincere soul passeth those hours with a sad heart, that it lives without a return of its request; 'I am a woman,' saith Hannah to Eli, 'of a sorrowful spirit,' 1 Sam. i. 15: and why so? Alas! she had from year to year prayed to God, and no answer was yet come: thus saith the soul, I am one of a bitter spirit; I have prayed for a soft heart, a believing heart, many a day and month, but it is not come; I am afraid I was not sincere in the business; could my request so long have hung in the clouds else? Such a soul is full of fears and troubles: like a merchant that hath a rich ship at sea, who cannot sleep on land till he sees her, or hears of her. But if, when thou hast sent up thy prayer, thou canst cast off the care and thoughts of the business, as if praying were only like children's scribbling over pieces of paper, which when they have done they lay aside and think no more of them: if thou canst take denials at God's hands for such things as these, and blank no more than a cold suitor doth when he hears not from her whom he never really loved, it breaks not thy rest, embitters not thy joy, a false heart set thee on work. And take heed, that instead of answering thy prayer, God doth not answer the secret desire of thy heart; which should he do, thou art undone for ever.

Secondly, Observe whether thou usest the means to obtain that which thou prayest God to give. A false heart sits still itself, while it sets God on work; like him, that when his cart was set in the slough, cried, Jupiter, help! but would not put his own shoulder to the wheel! if corruptions may be mortified and killed for him, as Goliath was for the Israelites, he like them, looking on, and not put to strike stroke, so it is: but for any encounter with them, or putting himself to the trouble of using any means for obtaining the victory, he is so eaten up with sloth and cowardice, that it is as grievous, he thinks, as to sit still in slavery and bondage to them. But a sincere soul is conscientiously laborious: 'Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto the Lord,' Lam. iii. 41; that is, saith Bernard, *Oremus et laboremus;* let us pray and use the endeavour; the hypocrite's tongue wags, but the sincere soul's feet walk, and hands work.

Thirdly, The sincere soul discovers its plainness and simplicity to men. We had our conversation 'among you,' saith Paul to the Corinthians, in 'simplicity,' and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom. The Christian is one that cannot subject his heart to his head, his conscience to his policy; he commits himself to God in well-doing, and fears not others, if he be not conscious to himself; and therefore he dares not make a hole in his conscience to keep his skin whole, but freely and openly vouches God without dissembling his profession; while the hypocrite shifts his sails, and puts forth such colours as his policy and worldly interest adviseth; if the coast be clear, and no danger at hand, he will

Digitized by Google

appear as religious as any; but no sooner he makes discovery of any hazard it may put him to, but he tacks about, and shapes another course, making no bones of juggling with God and man; he counts that his right road, which leads to his temporal safety; but quite contrary the upright, Prov. xvi. 17: 'The highway of the upright is to depart from evil.' This is the road that this true traveller jogs on in; and if he be at any time seen out of it, it is upon no other account, than a man that hath unwillingly lost his way, never quiet till he strike into it again.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, The sincere true-hearted Christian is uniform. As truth in the doctrine differs in this from its opposite, that it is one error diverse; there is no harmony among errors as among truths; so truth of heart, or sincerity is known from hypocrisy by the same character. Indeed truth in the heart is but the copy and transcript of the other; they agree, as the face in the glass doth with the face in the man that looks in it, or as the image in the wax with the sculpture in the seal, from which it is derived; therefore if truth in the word be uniform and harmonious, then truth in the heart, which is nothing but the impression of that there, must also be so. A sincere Christian in the tenor of his course is like himself, *vir unius coloris*, of one colour, not like your changeable stuffs, so woven that you may by turning them divers ways see divers colours.

There is a threefold uniformity in the sincere Christian's obedience; he is uniform *quoad objectum, subjectum, et circumstantias obedientiæ;* as to the object, subject, and several circumstances that accompany his obedience..

First, As to the object; the hypocrite indeed is in with one duty, and out with another: like a globous body, he toucheth the law of God in one point, some particular command he seems zealous for, but meets not in the rest; whereas the sincere heart lies close to the whole law of God in his desire and endeavour. The upright man's foot is said to 'stand in an even place,' Psa. xxvi. 11: he walks not haltingly and uncomely, as those who go in unequal ways, which are hobbling, and up and down! or those whose feet and legs are not even, (as Solomon saith,) 'the legs of the lame are not even,' and so cannot stand in an even place, because one is long, and the other short; the sincere man's feet are even, and legs of a length, as I may say; his care alike conscientious to the whole will of God. The hypocrite, like the badger, hath one foot shorter than another; or, like a foundered horse, he doth not stand, as we say, right of all four; one foot at least you shall perceive he favours, loth to put it down. The Pharisees pretended much zeal to the first table, they prayed and fasted in an extraordinary manner; but they prayed for their prey; and when they had fasted all day, they sup at the poor widow's cost, her house they mean to devour. A sad fast that ends in oppression, and only serves to get them a ravenous appetite, to swallow others' estates under a pretence of devotion. The moralist is very punctual in his dealings with men, but very thievish in his carriage to God; though he will not wrong his neighbour of a farthing, he sticks not to rob God of greater matters; his love, fear, faith, are due debts to God, but he makes no conscience of paying them. It is ordinary in Scripture to describe a saint, a godly person, by a particular duty, a single grace; sometimes his character is, 'one that feareth an oath,' Eccles. ix. 2; sometimes 'one that loves the brethren,' 1 John iii. 14; and so of the rest; and why? but because wherever one duty is conscientiously performed, the heart stands ready for another. As God hath enacted all his commands with the same authority, wherefore it is said, 'God spake all these words,' Exod. xx. 1; one as well as the other. So God infuseth all grace together, and writes not one particular law in the heart of his children, but the whole law, which is an universal principle, inclining the soul impartially to all: so that, if thou likest not all, thou art sincere in none.

Secondly, The sincere Christian is uniform, *quoad subjectum;* the whole man, so far as renewed, moves one way; all the powers and faculties of the soul join forces, and have a sweet accord together; when the understanding makes discovery of a truth, then conscience improves her utmost authority on the will, commanding it, in the name of God, whose officer it is, to entertain it; the will, so soon as conscience knocks, opens herself, and lets it in: the affections, like dutiful handmaids, seeing it a guest welcome to the will, their mistress, express their readiness to wait on it as becomes them in their places. But in the

Digitized by Google

hypocrite it is not so; there one faculty fights against another; never are they all found to conspire and meet in friendly vote; when there is light in the understanding, the man knows this truth and that duty; then often conscience is bribed for executing its office, it doth not so much check him for the neglect of it; truth stands as it were before the soul, and conscience will not so much befriend it as to knock, and rouse up the soul to let it in; if conscience be overcome to plead its cause, and shews some activity in pressing for entertainment it is sure either to have a churlish denial, with a frown for its pains, in being so busy to bring such an unwelcome guest with it, as the froward wife doth by her husband, when he brings home with him one she doth not like, or else a feigned entertainment, the more subtilly to hide the secret enmity it hath against it.

Thirdly, *Quoad circumstantias obedientia:* the sincere soul is uniform as to the circumstances of his obedience and holy walking; such as are time, place, and company, and manner. He is uniform as to time: his religion is not like a holiday suit, put on only at set times; but come to him when you will, you shall find him clad alike, holy on the Lord's day, and holy on the week day too, Psa. cvi. 3: 'Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times;' it is a sign it is not a man's complexion, when the colour he hath while he sits by a fire dies away soon after. There are some if you would see their goodness, and be acquainted with their godliness, you must hit the right time, or else you will find none, like some flowers that are seen but some months in the year; or like some physicians that they call forenoon men, they that would speak with them to any purpose, must come in the morning, because commonly they are drunk in the afternoon; thus, may-be in the morning, you may take the hypocrite on his knees, in a saint's posture, but when that fit is over, you shall see little of God in all his course, till night brings him again of course to the like duty. The watch is naught that goes only at first winding up, and stands all the day after; and so is that heart, sure, that desires not always to keep in spiritual motion. I confess there may be a great difference in the standing of two watches; one from the very watch itself, because it hath not the right make, this will ever do so till altered; another possibly is true work, only some dust clogs the wheels, or a fall hath a little battered it, which removed it will go well again. And there is as great difference between the sincere soul and hypocrite in this case; the sincere soul may be interrupted in its spiritual motion and Christian course, but it is from some temptation that at present clogs him; but he hath a new nature which inclines to a constant motion in holiness, and doth, upon removing the present impediment return to its natural exercise of godliness; but the hypocrite fails in the very constitution and frame of his spirit, he hath not a principle of grace in him to keep him moving.

Again, The sincere Christian is uniform as to place and company; wherever he goes he carries his rule with him, which squares him: within doors, amidst his nearest relations, David's resolve is his, Psalm ci. 2: 'He will walk within his house with a perfect heart;' follow him abroad, he carries his conscience with him, and doth not bid it, as Abraham his servants, when ascending the mount, to stay behind till he comes back. The Romans had a law, that every one should, wherever he went, wear a badge of his trade in his hat, or outward vestment, that he might be known. The sincere Christian never willingly lays aside the badge of his holy profession. No place nor company turns him out of the way that is called holy. Indeed his conscience doth not make him forgo his prudence; he knows how to distinguish place and place, company and company, and therefore, when cast among boisterous sinners and scornful ones, he doth not betray religion to scorn, by throwing its pearls before such as would trample on them, and rend him; yet he is very careful lest his prudence should put his uprightness to any hazard: 'I will behave myself wisely,' saith David, in the forenamed Psalm, 'in a perfect way;' that is, I will shew myself as wise as I can, so I may also be upright.' Truly that place and company is like the Torrid Zone, uninhabitable to a gracious soul, where profaneness is so hot that sincerity cannot look out and shew itself, by seasonable counsel and reproof, with safety to the saint; and therefore they that have neither so much zeal to protest against the sins of such, nor so much care of themselves as to withdraw from thence, where they can only receive evil, and do no good, have just cause to call their sincerity into question.

Digitized by Google

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, The sincere Christian is progressive, never at his journey's end till he gets to heaven; this keeps him always in motion, advancing in his desires and endeavours forward: he is thankful for little grace, but not content with great measures of grace: 'When I awake,' saith David, 'I shall be satisfied with thy likeness,' Psa. xvii. 15. He had many a sweet entertainment at the house of God in his ordinances. The Spirit of God was the messenger that brought him many a covered dish from God's table, inward consolations, which the world knew not of. Yet David has not enough, it is heaven alone that can give him his full draught. They say the Gauls, when they first tasted of the wines of Italy, were so taken with their lusciousness and sweetness, that they could not be content to trade thither for this wine, but resolved they would conquer the land where they grew. Thus the sincere soul thinks it not enough to receive a little now and then of grace and comfort from heaven, by trading and holding commerce at a distance with God in his ordinances here below, but projects and medidates a conquest of that holy land and blessed place from which such rich commodities come, that he may drink the wine of that kingdom in that kingdom. This raiseth the soul to high and noble enterprises, how it may attain to further degrees of grace every day than other, and so climb nearer and nearer heaven. He that aims at the sky shoots higher than he that means only to hit a tree. 'I press,' saith Paul, 'toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,' Phil. iii. 14. Others admired Paul's attainments. O that they had Paul's grace, and then they should be happy! But he who would count himself very unhappy if he might have no more; he professeth he hath not apprehended what he runs for; the prize stands not in the midway, but at the end of the race, and therefore he puts on with full speed, yea, makes it the trial of uprightness in all, ver. 15: 'Let us therefore, as many as be perfect,' that is, sincere, 'be thus minded.' It is the hypocrite that stints himself in the things of God. A little knowledge he would have, that may help him to discourse of religion among the religious; and for more, he leaves it as more fitting for the preacher himself. Some outward formalities he likes, and make use of in profession, as attendance on public ordinances, and sins which would make him stink among his neighbours he forbears; but as for pressing into more inward and nearer communion with God in ordinances, labouring to get his heart more spiritual, the whole body of sin more and more mortified, this was never his design. Like some slighty tradesman, that never durst look so high as to think of being rich, but thinks it well enough if he can but hold his shop doors open, and keep himself out of the jail, though with a thousand shifting tricks.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WORD OF DIRECTION TO THOSE WHO, UPON TRIAL, ARE FOUND UNSOUND AND FALSE-HEARTED.

HAVING laid down characters of the sincere heart, it will be necessary to make some improvement of them, as the report shall be that conscience makes in your bosoms, upon putting yourselves to the trial of your spiritual states by the same. Now, the report that conscience makes, after examination of yourselves, by those notes prefixed, will amount to one of these three inferences. Either it will condemn thee for a hypocrite, or pronounce thee a sincere Christian; or, thirdly, bring in an ignoramus, and leave thee in doubt whether thou art sincere or not. That I may therefore find thee, reader, at one door, if I miss thee at another, I shall speak severally to all three.

First, To such who upon trial are cast; evidence comes in so clear and strong against them that their conscience cannot hold, but tells them plainly, if these be the marks of sincerity, then they are hypocrites. The improvement I would make of this trial, for your sakes, is to give a word of counsel what in this case you are to do that you may become sincere.

First, Get thy heart deeply affected with thy present dismal state. No hope of cure till thou art chafed into some sense of feeling of thy deplored condition. Physic cannot be given so long as the patient is asleep; and it is the nature of this disease to make the soul heavy-eyed, and dispose it to a kind of slumber of conscience, by reason of the flattering thoughts the hypocrite hath of himself

Digitized by Google

from some formalities he performs above others in religion, which fume up from his deceived heart, like so many pleasing vapours, from the stomach to the head, and bind up his spiritual senses into a kind of stupidity, yea, cause many pleasing dreams to entertain him with vain hopes and false joys, which vanish as soon as he wakes and comes to himself. The Pharisees, the most notorious hypocrites of their age, how fast asleep were they in pride and carnal confidence, despising all the world in comparison of themselves, not afraid to commend themselves to God, yea, prefer themselves before others: 'God, I thank thee, I am not like this publican;' as if they would tell God they did look to find some more respect from him than others, so far beneath them, had at his hand. Therefore Christ, in his dealing with this proud generation of men, useth an unusual strain of speech; his voice, which to others was still and soft, is heard like thunder breaking out of the clouds when he speaks to them; how many dreadful claps have we almost together in the same chapter fall on their heads, out of the mouth of our meek and sweet Saviour, Matt. xxiii.: 'Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees.' No less than eight woes doth Christ discharge upon them, as so many case-shot together, that by multiplying the woes he might shew not only the certainty of the hypocrite's damnation, but precedency also; and yet how many of that rank do we read of to be awakened and converted by these sermons! Some few there were indeed, that the disease might appear not incurable, but very few, that we may tremble the more of falling into it, or letting it grow upon us. Peter learned of his Master how to handle the hypocrite, who, having to do with one far gone in this disease, Simon Magus, Acts viii. 21, he steeps his words as it were in vinegar and gall: 'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God;' there he lays the weight of his charge, that he carried a hypocritical heart in his bosom, which was a thousand times worse than his simoniacal fact, though that was foul enough; it was not barely that fact, but proceding from a heart inwardly rotten and false, which God gave Peter an extraordinary spirit to discern, that proved him to be in 'the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity;' only in this better than the damned souls in hell, they were in the fire, he in the bond of iniquity, like a faggot bound up, fit for it, but not cast in: they past hope, and he so much left as might amount to a 'perhaps' if the thought of his heart might be forgiven. To give but one instance more, and that is of a whole church, hypocritical Laodicea; the Spirit of God takes her up more sharply than all the rest, which though he charged with some particular miscarriages, yet finds something among them he owns and commends. But in her, because she was conceited already, as this leaven of hypocrisy naturally puffs up, he mentions nothing that was good in her, lest it should feed that humour that did so abound already, and take away the smartness of the reproof, which was the only probable means left of recovering her. All that inclines to sleep is deadly to a lethargic; and all that is soothing and cockering dangerous to hypocrites. Some say, the surest way to cure a lethargy, is to turn it into a fever. To be sure the safest way to deal with the hypocrites is to bring them from their false peace to a deep sense of their true misery. Let this then be thy first work; aggravate thy sin and put thy soul into mourning for it. When a person who was by the priest, who was to judge in case of leprosy, pronounced unclean, the leper thus convicted 'was to rend his clothes, go bareheaded, and put a covering upon his upper lip,' all ceremonies used by mourners, and to cry, 'Unclean, unclean!' Lev. xiii. 45. Thus do thou, as a true mourner, sit down and lament the plague of thy heart; cry out bitterly, 'Unclean, unclean I am!' not fit by reason of thy hypocritical heart to come near God or his saints, but to be, like the leper, separate from both. If thou hadst such a loathesome disease reigning on thee as did pollute the very seat thou sittest on, bed thou liest on, and drop such filthiness on every thing thou comest near, even to the meat thou eatest and cup thou drinkest from, that should make all abandon thy company, how great would thy sorrow be, as thou didst sit desolate and musing alone of thy doleful condition? Such a state thy hypocrisy puts thee into, a plague it is, more offensive to God than such a disease could make thee to men; it runs like a filthy sore through all the duties and goodly coverings that you can put over it, and defiles them and thee so, that God will take an offering out of the devil's hand as soon as out of thine while thou continuest a hypocrite; and did the

Digitized by Google

saints of God, with whom thou hast may be so much credit as to be admitted to join with them at present, know thee, they would make as much haste from thee as from him on whom they should see the plague-tokens; but should not thy disease be known till thou art dead, and so keep thy reputation with them, yea possibly by them be thought, when thou diest, a saint, will this give thee any content in hell, that they are speaking well of thee on earth? 'O poor Aristotle,' said one, 'thou art praised where thou art not, and burnt where thou art!' he meant it was poor comfort to that great heathen philosopher to be admired by men of learning, that have kept up his fame from generation to generation, if he all the while be miserable in the other world. So here, O poor hypocrite, thou art ranked among saints on earth, but punished among devils in hell.

Secondly, When thy heart is deeply affected with the sin and misery of thy hypocritical heart, thou must be convinced of thy insufficiency to make a cure of thyself. Hypocrisy is like a fistula sore, it may seem a little matter by the small orifice it hath, but it is therefore one of the hardest among wounds to be cured, because it is hard to find the bottom of it, O take heed thy heart doth not put a cheat upon thyself! It will be very forward to promise it will lie no more, be false and hypocritical no more, but take counsel of a wise man, who bids thee not rely on what it saith: 'He is a fool that trusts his own heart,' Prov. xxviii. 26. O how many die because loth to be at pains and costs to go to a skilful physician at first! take heed of self-resolutions and self-reformations; sin is like the king's evil, God, not ourselves, can cure it. He that will be tinkering with his own heart, and not seek out to heaven for help will in the end find, where he mends one hole he makes two worse; where he reforms one sin, he will fall into the hands of many more dangerous.

Thirdly, Betake thyself to Christ as the physician, on whose skill and faithfulness thou wilt rely entirely for cure. *Si percundum, inter peritissimos;* if thou perish, resolve to perish at his door. But for thy comfort know, never any that he undertook miscarried under his hand, nor ever refused he to undertake the cure of any that came to him on such an errand. He blamed those hypocrites, John v. 40-43, because they were ready to throw away their lives by trusting an empiric who should come in his own name, without any approbation or authority from God for the work, but 'would not come to him that they might have life, though he came in his Father's name, and had his seal and license to practise his skill on poor souls for their recovery. And he that blamed those for not coming, will not, cannot be angry with thee who comest. It is his calling, and men do not use to thrust customers out, but invite them into their shops. When Christ was on earth he gave this reason why he conversed so much with publicans and sinners, and so little among the Pharisees, because there was more work for him, Matt. ix, 11, 12. Men set up where they think trade will be quickest. Christ came to be a physician to sick souls; Pharisees were so well in their own conceit, that Christ saw he should have little to do among them, and so he applied himself to those who were more sensible of their sickness. If thou, poor soul, art but come to thyself so far as to groan under thy cursed hypocrisy, and directest these thy groans in a prayer to heaven for Christ's help, thou shalt have thy physician soon with thee, never fear it. He hath not, since he ascended, laid down his calling, but still follows his practice as close as ever; we find him sending his advice from heaven, in that excellent receipt, Rev. iii., to Laodicea, what she should do for her recovery out of this very disease of hypocrisy: 'I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed,' &c.; as if he had said, Laodicea, thou tradest in false ware, deceiving thyself and others with appearances for realities, counterfeit graces for true; thy gold is dross, thy garments rotten rags, which do not hide, but discover thy shame; come to me and thou shalt have that which is for thy turn, and better, cheap also; for though here is mention of buying, no more is meant than to come with a buyer's spirit, valuing Christ and his grace so high, that if they were to be bought, though with all the money in thy purse, yea, blood in thy veins, thou wouldst have them, and not go home and say thou wert hardly used. It is the thirsty soul that shall he satisfied, only look thy thirst be right and deep.

First, Right; a heart-thirst, and not simply a conscience-thirst. It is a very different heat that causeth the one and the other. Hell-fire may inflame the

Digitized by Google

conscience, so as to make the guilty sinner thirst for Christ's blood to quench the torment which the wrath of God hath kindled in his bosom; but it is heaven-fire, and only that, which begets a kindly heat in the heart, that breaks out in longings of soul for Christ and his Spirit, with sweet cooling dews of grace to slack and extinguish the fire of lust and sin.

Again, Look it be deep. Physicians tell us of a thirst which comes from the dryness of the throat, and not any great inward heat of the stomach; and this thirst may be quenched with a gargle in the mouth, which is spit out again, and goes not down. And truly there is something like this in many that sit under the preaching of the gospel. Some light touches are now and then found upon the spirits of men and women, occasioned by some spark that falls on their affections in hearing the word, whereby they on a sudden express some desires after Christ and his grace, that you would think they would in all haste for heaven; but being slighty flashes, and weak velleities, rather than strong volitions and deep desires, their heat is soon over, and thirst quenched with a little present sweetness they taste when they are hearing a sermon of Christ, which they spit out again as soon as they are gone home almost, as well as may be, though they never enjoy more of him. Labour, therefore, for such a deep sense of thy own wretchedness by reason of thy hypocrisy, and of Christ's excellency by reason of that fulness of grace in him, which makes him able to cure thee of thy distemper; that as a man thoroughly athirst can be content with nothing but drink, and not a little of that neither, but a full satisfying draught, whatever it costs him; so thou mayest not be bribed with anything besides Christ and his sanctifying grace, nor with gifts, profession, or pardon itself, if it could be severed from grace, no, not with a little sparkling of grace, but long for whole floods, wherewith thou mayest be fully purged and freed of thy cursed lust, which now so sadly oppresseth thee. This frame of spirit would put thee under the promise (heaven's security) that thou shalt not lose thy longing; if thou shouldst ask silver and gold, and seek any worldly enjoyment at this rate, thou mightest spend thy breath and pains in vain; God might let thee roar, like Dives in hell, in the midst of those flames which thy covetous lust had kindled, without affording a drop of that to cool thy tongue, which thou so violently pantest after; but if Christ and his grace be the things thou wouldest have, yea, must have, truly then thou shalt have them, Matt, v. 6: 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.'

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXHORTATION TO THOSE WHO UPON TRIAL ARE FOUND TO BE TRUE IN HEART, OR SINCERE, TO WEAR THIS BELT CLOSE GIRT TO THEM IN THE DAILY EXERCISE OF IT, WITH DIRECTIONS FOR THAT PURPOSE.

I COME to the second sort, such, I mean, whose consciences, upon diligent inquiry, give a fair testimony for their sincerity, that their hearts are true and upright. That which I have by way of counsel to leave with them is, to gird this belt which they have about them close, in the exercise and daily practice of it. Gird this belt, I say, close to thee; that is, be very careful to walk in the daily practice and exercise of thy uprightness. Think every morning thou art not dressed till this girdle be put on. The proverb is true here, 'ungirt, unblest;' thou art no company for God that day in which thou art not sincere. If Abraham will walk with God, he must be upright; and canst thou live a day without his company? Rachel paid dear for her mandrakes to part with her husband for them; a worse bargain that soul makes, that, to purchase some worldly advantage, pawns its sincerity; which gone, God is sure to follow after. And as thou canst not walk with God, so not expect any blessing from God; the promises, like a box of precious ointment, are kept to be broke over the head of the upright: Mic. ii. 7, 'Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?' And sure it is ill walking in that way where there is found no word from God to bid us good speed. Some are so superstitious, that if a hare crosseth them, they will turn back, and go no further that day; but a bold man is he that dares go on when the word of God lies across his way. Where the word doth not bless, it curseth; where it promiseth not, it threatens:

Digitized by Google

a soul in its uprightness, approving itself to God, is safe; like a traveller going about his lawful business betwixt sun and sun, if any harm or loss comes to such a soul, God will bear him out: the promise is on his side; by pleading it he may recover his loss at God's hands, who stands bound to keep him harmless. See to this purpose, Psalm lxxxiv. 11. But they are directions, not motives, I am in this place to give.

SECTION I.—First, Therefore, if thou wouldst walk in the exercise of thy sincerity, walk in the view of God. That of Luther is most true, *Omnia præcepta sunt in primo tanquam capite;* all the commands are wrapt up in the first; for, saith he, all sin is a contempt of God; and so we cannot break any other commands but we break the first. 'We think amiss of God, before we do amiss against God:' this God commended to Abraham *(Instar omnium)* as of sovereign use to preserve his sincerity: 'Walk before me, and be thou upright,' Gen. xvii. 1. This kept Moses's girdle straight, and close to his loins, that he was neither bribed with the treasures of Egypt, nor browbeaten out of his sincerity, with the anger of so great a king, Heb, xi. 27: 'For he endured, as seeing him who was invisible.' He had a greater than Pharaoh in his eye, and this kept him right.

First, Walk, Christian, in the view of God's omniscience; this is a girding consideration; say to thy soul, *Cave, videt Deus;* take heed, God seeth: it is under the rose, as the common phrase is, that treason is spoken, when subjects think they are far enough from their king's hearing; but did such know the prince to be under the window, or behind the hangings, their discourse would be more loyal. This made David so upright in his walking, Psalm cxix. 168: 'I have kept thy precepts, for all my ways are before thee.' If Alexander's empty chair, which his captains when they met in counsel, set before them, did awe them so as to keep them in good order; what would it, for to set God looking on us in our eye? The Jews covered Christ's face, and then buffeted him, Mark xiv. 65. So does the hypocrite; he first says in his heart, God sees not, or at least he forgets that he sees, and then makes bold to sin against him; like that foolish bird, which runs her head among the reeds, and thinks herself safe from the fowler, as if because she did not see him, therefore he could not see her. *Te mihi abscondam, non me tibi,* (Aug.) I may hide thee from my eye, but not myself from thine. Thou mayest, poor creature, hide God by thy ignorance and atheism, so that thou shalt not see him, but thou canst not so as he shall not see thee. 'All things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' O remember thou hast to do with God in all thou dost, whether thou art in shop or closet, church or market; and he will have to do with thee, for he sees thee round, and can tell from whence thou comest; when, like Gehazi before his master, thou enterest into his presence, and standest demurely before him in his worship, as if thou hadst been nowhere, then he can tell thee thy thoughts, and without any labour of pumping them out by thy confession, set them in order before thee; yea, thy thoughts that are gone from thee (like Nebuchadnezzar's dream from him) and thou hast forgot what they were at such a time, and in such a place, forty, fifty years ago. God hath them all in the light of his countenance, as atoms are in the beams of the sun: and he can, yea, will give thee a sight of them, that they shall walk in thy conscience to thy horror, as John Baptist's ghost did in Herod's.

Secondly, Walk in the view of his providence and care over thee. When God bids Abraham be upright, he strengthens his faith on him: 'I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be perfect;' as if he had said, Act thou for me, and I will take care for thee. When once we begin to call his care in question towards us, then will our sincerity falter in our walking before him; hypocrisy lies hid in distrust and jealousy as in its cause; if the soul dare not rely on God, it cannot be long true to God. Abraham was jealous of Abimelech, therefore he dissembled with him; thus do we with God; we doubt God's care, and then live by our wit, and carve for ourselves: 'Up, make us gods,' say they, 'we know not what is become of Moses.' The unbelieving Jews, flat against the command of God, keep manna until the morrow, Exod. xvi. 19; and why? but because they had not faith to trust him for another meal: this is the old weapon the devil hath ever used to beat the Christian out of his sincerity with:

Digitized by Google

'Curse God, and die,' said he to Job by his wife, Job ii. 9. As if she had said, What! wilt thou yet hold the castle of thy sincerity for God? Captains think they may yield, when no relief comes to them; and subjects make account, if the prince protect not them, they are not bound to serve him. Thou hast lain thus long in an afflicted state, besieged close with sorrows on every hand, and no news to this day comes from heaven of any care that God takes for thee; therefore 'curse God, and die;' yea, Christ had him using the same engine to draw him off from his faithfulness to his Father, when he bade him turn stones into bread. We see therefore of what importance it is to strengthen our faith on the care and providence of God, for our provision and protection; which is the cause why God hath made such abundant provision to shut all doubting and fear of this out of the hearts of his people. The promises are so fitly placed, that as safe harbours, upon what coast soever we be sailing, or what condition soever we are in, if any storm arise at sea, or enemy chase us, we may put into some one or other of them, and be safe, though this one were enough, could we find no more to serve our turn, 2 Chron. xvi. 9: 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them,' (or strongly to hold with them,) 'whose heart is perfect towards him.' God doth not set others to watch, but his own eyes keep sentinel; now to watch with the child, like the own mother, there is the immediacy of his providence. We may say of sincere souls, what is said of Canaan, Deut. xi. 9, 10: 'It is a land,' (so they are a people,) 'the Lord himself careth for, his eyes are always on them.' Again, 'his eyes run to and fro;' there is the vigilancy of his providence; no danger, no temptation finds him sleeping, but as a faithful watchman is ever walking up and down, so the eyes of God run to and fro; 'he that keepeth Israel,' (the sincere soul, which is the Israelite indeed,) 'shall neither slumber nor sleep,' Psa. cxxi. 4; that is, not little nor much; nor slumber by day, nor sleep by night; two words are there used, one that signifies the short sleep used in the heat of the day, the other for the more sound sleep of the night. Thirdly, 'Throughout the whole earth;' there is the universality and extent of God's care; it is an encompassing providence, it walks the rounds; not any one sincere soul left out of the line of his care. He has the number of them to a man, and all are alike cared for. We disfigure the beautiful face of God's providence, when we fancy him to have a cast of his eye, and care to one more than another. Fourthly, To shew himself strong in the behalf of them; there is the efficacy of his care and providence; his eyes do not run to and fro to espy dangers, and only tell us what they are, as the sentinel wakes the city when any enemy comes, but cannot defend them from their fury. A child may do this, yea, the geese did this for Rome's capital. But God watcheth, not to tell us our dangers, but to save us from them; the saints must needs be a happy people, 'because a people saved by the Lord,' Deut. xxxiii. 29. God doth not only see with his eyes, but also fights with his eyes. He gave such a look to the Egyptians, as turned the sea on them to their destruction.

Section II.—Secondly, Labour to act from love, and not fear. Slavish fear and sincerity cannot agree; if one be in the increase, the other is in the wane always. See them opposed, 2 Tim. i. 7: 'God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind;' that is, sincere; where he implies that fear is weak and impotent, easily scared from God, his truth, and service; and not so only, but unsound also; not trusting such a one with any great matter. The slave, though he works hard, because, indeed, he dares no other, yet is soon drawn into a conspiracy against his master, because he hates him while he fears him. We see this not only among the Turks (against whom those Christians, used as absolute slaves by them in their galleys, do, when they have advantage in fight, often purchase their own liberty by cutting the throats of their tyrant masters), but also in kingdoms where subjects rather fear than love their princes, how ready they are to invite another into the throne, or welcome any that should court them. Thus fast and loose will he be with God, that is pricked on with the sword's point of his wrath, and not drawn with the cords of his love. Israel is an example beyond parallel for this: 'When God slew them, they sought after him; nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongue: for their heart was not right

Digitized by Google

with him,' Psa. lxxxviii. 34, 35. They feared God, and loved their lusts; and therefore they betrayed his glory at every turn into their hands; as Herod did John's head, whom he feared, into her hands whom he loved. And truly there is too much of this slavish fear to be found in the saints' bosoms, or else the whip should not be so often in God's hand. We find God checking his people for this, and making their servile spirit the reason of his severity towards them. 'Is Israel a servant, a home-born slave? Why is he spoiled?' Jer. ii. 14. As if God had said, What is the reason that I must use thee, who art my dear child, as coarsely as if thou wert a servant, a slave, laying on blow after blow upon thy back with such heavy judgments? Wouldst thou know? read ver. 17: 'Hast thou not procured this to thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, when he led thee by the way?' Thou mayest thank thyself for this my unusual dealing with thee. If the child will forget his own ingenuity, and nothing but blows will work with him, then the father must deal with his child according to his servile spirit. When God led Israel by the way, as a father his child, lovingly, he flung from him; and if they would not lead by love, then no wonder he makes them drive by fear, O Christian, act more by love, and thou wilt save God's putting thee into fear with his whip; love will keep thee close and true to him. The very character of love is, 'it seeks not her own,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5. And what is it to be sincere, but when the Christian seeks Christ's interest, and not his own? Jonathan loved David dearly; this made him incur his father's wrath, trample on the hopes of a kingdom, which he had for him and his posterity, rather than be false to his friend. Lot delivers up his daughters to the lusts of the Sodomites, rather than his guests. Samson could not conceal that great secret from Delilah, whom he loved, wherein his strength lay, though it was as much as his life was worth to blab it to her. Love is the great conqueror of the world. Thus will thy soul, being inflamed with love to Christ, set all thy wordly interest adrift, rather than put his honour to the least hazard. Abraham did not more willingly put his sacrificing knife to the ram's throat to save his dear Isaac's life, than thou wilt be to sacrifice thy life to keep thy sincerity alive. Love is compared to fire, the nature of which is, to assimilate to itself all that comes near it, or to consume them: it turns all into fire or ashes; nothing that is heterogeneous can dwell with its own simple, pure nature. Thus love to Christ will not suffer the near neighbourhood of any thing in its bosom that is derogatory to Christ; either it will reduce or abandon it, be it pleasure, profit, or whatever else. Abraham, who loved Hagar and Ishmael in their due place, when the one began to jostle with her mistress, and other jeer and mock at Isaac, he packs them both out of doors. Love to Christ will not suffer thee to side with any thing against Christ, but take his part with him against any that oppose him, and so long thy sincerity is out of danger.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, Mediate often on the simplicity and sincerity of God's heart to his saints. What more powerful consideration can be thought on to make us true to God, than the faithfulness and truth of God to us? Absalom, though as vile a dissembler as lived, yet when Hushai came out to him, he suspected him, 2 Sam. xvi. 17: 'And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not out to thy friend?' His own conscience told him that it was horrible baseness for him, that had found David such a true friend, now to join in rebellious armies against him; and though Absalom, that said this, did offer greater violence to this law of love, yet he questioned, it seems, whether any durst be so wicked besides himself. When, therefore, Christian, thou findest thy heart warping into any insincere practice, lay it under this consideration, and if anything of God and his grace be in thee, it will unbend thee, and bring thee to rights again. Ask thy soul, 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' Such a friend as God hath been, is, and surely will be to thee for ever. God, when his people sin, to put them to the blush, asks them whether he gives them any cause for their unkind and undutiful carriages to him. 'Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' Jer. ii. 5. So Moses, intending to pay Israel home (before he goes up and dies on Nebo) for all their hypocrisy, murmuring, and horrible rebellions against God, all along, from first setting out of Egypt to that day, he brings in their

Digitized by Google

charge, and draws out the several indictments that they were guilty of? Now, to add the greater weight to every one, he, in the fore-front of all his speech, shows what a God he is that they have done all this against.

He makes way to the declaiming against their sins, by the proclaiming the glory of God against whom they were committed, Deut. xxxii. 3: 'I will publish the name of God; ascribe ye greatness to our God.' And very observable it is, what of God's name he publisheth, the more to aggravate their sins, and help them to conceive of their heinous nature, ver. 4: 'He is thy rock, his work is perfect; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' He chooseth to instance in the truth and sincerity of God's heart to them in all his dispensations, as that which might make them most ashamed of their doings. Now, because this one consideration may be of such use to hedge in the heart, and keep it close to God in sincerity, I shall shew wherein the truth and sincerity of God's love appears to his saints, every one of which will furnish us with a strong argument to be sincere and upright with God.

First, The sincerity of God's heart appears in the principle he acts from, and ends he aims at in all his dispensations. Love is the principle he constantly acts from, and their good the end he propounds: from these he never swerves; the fire of love never goes out of his heart, nor their good out of his eye. When he frowns with his brow, chides with his lips, and strikes with his hand, even then his heart burns with love, and his thoughts meditate peace to them. Famous is that place for this purpose, Jer. xxiv. 5: 'I will acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good; I will set mine eyes on them for good;' and this was one of the sharpest judgments God ever brought upon his people, and yet in this he is designing mercy, and projecting how to do them good. So in the wilderness, when they cried out upon Moses for bringing them thither to kill them, they were more afraid than hurt; God wished them better than they dreamed of; his intent was 'to humble them, that he might do them good in the latter end.' So sincere is God to his people, that he gives his own glory in hostage to them for their security; his own robes of glory are locked up in their prosperity and salvation: he will not, indeed he cannot, present himself in all his magnificence and royalty, till he hath made up his intended thoughts of mercy to his people; he is pleased to prorogue the time of his appearing in all his glory to the world, till he hath actually accomplished their deliverance, that he and they may come forth together in their glory on the same day, Psa. cii. 16: 'When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.' The sun is ever glorious in the most cloudy day, but appears not so till it hath scattered the clouds that muffle it up from the sight of the lower world: God is glorious when the world sees him not; but his declarative glory then appears, when the glory of his mercy, truth and faithfulness break forth in his people's salvation. Now, what shame must this cover thy face with, O Christian, if thou shouldst not sincerely aim at thy God's glory, who loves thee, yea, all his children, so dearly, as to ship his own glory and your happiness in one bottom, that he cannot now lose the one, and save the other!

Secondly, The truth and sincerity of God to his people appears in the openness and plainness of his heart to them. A friend that is close and reserved, deservedly comes under a cloud in the thoughts of his friend; but he who carries, as it were, a window of crystal in his breast, through which his friend may read what thoughts are writ in his very heart, delivers himself from the least suspicion of unfaithfulness. Truly, thus open-hearted is God to his saints: 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him,' Psalm xxv. 14. He gives us his key, that will let us into his very heart, and acquaint us what his thoughts are, yea, were, towards us, before a stone was laid in the world's foundation; and this is no other than his Spirit, 1 Cor. iii. 'One who knows the deep things of God;' for he was at the council-table in heaven, where all was transacted. This, his Spirit, he employed to put forth and publish in the Scripture, indited by him, the substance of those counsels of love which had passed between the Trinity of Persons for our salvation; and that nothing may be wanting for our satisfaction, he hath appointed the same Holy Spirit to abide in his saints, that as Christ in heaven presents our desires to him, so he

Digitized by Google

may interpret his mind out of his word to us; which word answers the heart of God, as face answers face in the glass. There is nothing desirable in a true friend as to this openness of heart, but God performs in a transcendant manner to his people. If any danger hangs over their heads, he cannot conceal it: 'By them,' saith David, 'is thy servant warned,' speaking of the word of God; one messenger or other God will send to give his saints the alarm, whether their danger be from sin within or enemies without. Hezekiah was in danger of inward pride; God sends a temptation 'to let him know what was in his heart,' that he might, by falling once, be kept from falling again. Satan had a project against Peter; Christ gives him notice of it, Luke xxii. If any of his children by sin deceive him, he doth not, as false friends use, dissemble the displeasure he conceives, and carry it fair outwardly with them, while he keeps a secret grudge against them inwardly; no he tells them roundly of it, and corrects them soundly for it, but entertains no ill-will against them; and when he leads his people into an afflicted state, he loves them so, that he cannot leave them altogether in the dark concerning the thoughts of love he hath to them in delivering them; but, to comfort them in the prison, doth open his heart beforehand to them, as we see in the greatest calamities that have befallen the Jewish church in Egypt and Babylon, as also the gospel church under Antichrist. The promises for the deliverance out of all these were expressed before the sufferings came. When Christ was on earth, how free and open was he to his disciples, both in telling them what calamities should befall them, and the blessed issue of them all when he should come again to them; and why, but to confirm them in the persuasion of the sincerity of his heart towards them, as those words import, John xiv.: 'If it were not so, I would have told you;' as if he had said, it would not have consisted with the sincere love I bear to you, to hide anything, that is fit for you to know, from you, or make them otherwise than they are; and when he doth conceal any truths from them for the present, see his candour and sincerity, opening the reason of his veiling them to be, not that he grudged them the communication of them, but because they could not at present bear them. Now, Christian, improve all this to make thee more plain-hearted with God. Is he so free and open to thee, and wilt thou be so reserved to him? Doth thy God unbosom his mind to thee, and wilt not thou pour out all thy soul to him? Darest thou not trust him with thy secrets, that makes thee privy to his counsels of love and mercy? In a word, darest thou for shame go about to harbour and hide from him any traitorous lust in thy soul, whose love will not suffer him to conceal any danger from thee? God, who is so exact and true to the law of friendship with his people, expects the like ingenuity from them.

Thirdly, The sincerity of God's heart and affection to his people appears in the unmovableness of his love. As there is no shadow of turning in the being of God, so not in the love of God to his people: there is no vertical point; his love stands still; like the sun in Gibeon, it goes not down nor declines, but continues in its full strength, Isa. liv. 7: 'With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.' Sorry man repents of his love; the hottest affection cools in his bosom: love in the creature is like fire on the hearth, now blazing, anon blinking, and going out; but in God, like fire in the element, that never fails. In the creature, it is like water in a river, that falls and riseth; but in God, like water in the sea, that is always full, and knows no ebbing or flowing. Nothing can take off his love where he hath placed it; it can neither be corrupted nor conquered; attempts are made both ways, but in vain.

First, his love cannot be corrupted. There have been such that have dared to tempt God, and court, yea bribe the Holy One of Israel to desert and come off from his people. Thus Balaam went to win God over to Balak's side against Israel; which to obtain, he spared no cost, but built altar after altar, and heaped sacrifice upon sacrifice; yea, what would they not have done to have gained but a word or two out of God's mouth against his people? But he kept true to them; yea, left a brand of his displeasure upon that nation for hiring Balaam and sending him on such an errand to God, Deut. xxxiii. 4. This passage we find of God minding his people, to continue in them a persuasion of his sincere, stedfast love to them, Micah vi. 5: 'O my people,

Digitized by Google

remember what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim into Gilgal;' and why should they remember this? 'That he may know the righteousness of the Lord:' that is, that you may know how true and faithful a God I have been to you. Sometimes he makes use of it to provoke them to be sincere to him, as he in that proved himself to them, Josh. xxiv. 9. He tells them how Balak sent Balaam to set God a cursing them; 'but,' saith the Lord,' 'I would not hearken to him,' but made him that came to curse you, with his own lips entail a blessing on you and yours; and why is this story mentioned? see ver. 14: 'Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth.' A most natural and reasonable inference from the premises of God's truth and faithfulness. O Christian, wouldst thou have thy love to God made incorruptible? Embalm it often in thy thoughts with the sweet spices of God's sincere love to thee, which is immortal, and cannot see corruption. Believe God is true to thee, and be false to him if thou darest. It is a solecism and barbarism in love, to return falseness for faithfulness.

Secondly, The love of God to his saints cannot be conquered. That which puts it hardest to it, is not the power of his people's enemies, whether men or devils; but his people's sins. God makes nothing of their whole power and wrath, when combined together; but truly the sins of his people, these put omnipotency itself to the trial. We never hear God groaning under, or complaining of the power of his enemies, but often sadly of his people's sins and unkindnesses; these load him, these break his heart, and make him cry out as if he were at a stand in his thoughts (to use a human expression), and found it not easy what to do, whether love them or leave them; vote for their life or death. Well, whatever expressions God useth, to make his people more deeply resent their unkindness shewn to him, yet God is not at a loss what to do in this case; his love determines his thoughts in favour of his covenant people when their carriage least deserves it, Hos. xi. 9. The devil thought he had enough against Joshua, when he could find some filth on his garment, to carry this in a tale, and tell God what a dirty case his child was in; he made just account to have set God against him, but he was mistaken, for instead of provoking him to wrath, it moved him to pity; instead of falling out with him, he finds Christ praying for him, Zech. iii. Now improve this in a meditation, Christian. Is the love of God so unconquerable, that thy very sins cannot break, or cut the knot of that covenant which ties thee to him? And does it not shame thee, that thou shouldest be so fast and loose with him? Thou shouldest labour to have the very image of thy heavenly Father's love more clearly stamped on the face of thy love to him. As nothing can conquer his love to thee, so neither let anything prejudice thy love to him: say to thy soul, Shall not I cleave close to God when he hides his face from me, who hath not cast me off when I have sinfully turned my back on him? Shall not I give testimony to his truth and name, though others desert the one, and reproach the other, who hath kept love burning in his heart to me, when I have been dishonouring him? What, God yet on my side, and gracious to me, after such backslidings as these, and shall I again grieve his Spirit, and put his love to shame with more undutifulness? God forbid? this were to do my utmost to make God accessory to my sin, by making his love fuel for it.

Section IV.—Fourthly, Beware of presumptuous sins; these give the deepest wound to uprightness, yea, are inconsistent with it, Psa. xix. 13: 'Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright.' One single act of presumption is inconsistent with the actual exercise of uprightness; as we see in David, who by that one foul sin of murder, lost the present use of uprightness, and was, in that particular, too like one of the fools in Israel, and therefore stands as the only exception to the general testimony which God gave unto his uprightness, 1 Kings xv. 5: 'David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.' That is, there was no such presumption in any other sin committed by him, and therefore they are here discounted, as to this, that they did not make such a breach on his uprightness, as this one sin did. And as one act of a sin, presumptuous, is inconsistent with actual uprightness;

Digitized by Google

so habitual uprightness is very hardly consistent with habitual presumption; if one act of a presumptuous sin, and as I may so say, one sip of this poisonous cup, doth so sadly infect the spirit of a gracious person, and change his complexion, that he is not like himself; how deadly must it needs be to all uprightness to drink from day to day in it! And therefore as 'Daniel purposed in his heart, that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat,' Dan. i. 8; so do thou daily put thyself under some such holy bond, that thou wilt not defile thyself with any presumptuous sin; for, indeed, this is properly 'the king's meat,' I mean the devil's, that prince of darkness, who can himself commit none but presumptuous sins, and chiefly labours to defile souls by eating of this his dish: say, as Austin in another case, *Errare possum, hæreticus esse nolo:* I may err, but I am resolved not to be a heretic. I may have many failings, but, by the grace of God, I will labour that I be not a presumptuous sinner; and if thou wouldest not be in a presumptuous sin, take heed thou makest not light of less infirmities; when David's heart smote him for rending the skirt of Saul, he stopped and made a happy retreat, his tender conscience giving him a private check for rending his skirt, would not suffer him to cut his throat, and take away his life, which was better than raiment. But at another time, when his conscience was more heavy-eyed, and did not do this friendly office to him, but let him shoot his amorous glances after Bathsheba, without giving him any alarm of his danger; the good man, like one whose senses are gone, and head dizzy at the first trip upon a steep hill, could not recover himself, but tumbled from one sin to another, till at last he fell into the deep pit of murder. When the river is frozen, a man will venture to walk and run where he durst not set his foot if the ice were but melted or broke. O when the heart of a godly man himself is so hardened that he can stand on an infirmity though never so little, and his conscience not crack under him, how far may he go! I tremble to think what sin he may fall into.

SECTION V.—Fifthly, Get above the love and fear of the world. The Christian's sincerity is not eclipsed without the interposition of earth betwixt God and his soul.

First, The love of the world: this is a fit root for hypocrisy to grow upon; if the heart be violently set on anything the world hath, and it comes to vote peremptorily for having it: I must be worth so much a year, have such honour; and the creature begins with Ahab, to be sick with longing after them; then the man is in great danger to take the first ill counsel that Satan or the flesh gives him for the attaining his ends, though prejudicial to his uprightness. Hunters mind not the way they go in; over hedge and ditch they leap, so they may have the hare.

It is a wonder, I confess, that any saint should have so strong a scent after the creature, that hath the savour of Christ's ointment poured into his bosom. One would think the sweet perfume, which comes so hot from those beds of spices, the promises, should spoil the Christian's hunting-game after the creature, and one scent should hinder the taking in the other; the purer sweetnesses that breathe from Christ and heaven in them, should so fill the Christian's senses, that the other enjoyments, being of a more gross and earthy savour, should find no pleasing resentment in his nostrils; which indeed is most true and certain, so long as the Christian hath his spiritual senses open, and in exercise: but alas, as upon some cold in the body, the head is stopped, and the senses bound up from doing their office, so through the Christian's negligence, a spiritual distemper is easily got, whereby those senses, graces, I mean, which should judge of things, are sadly obstructed; and now, when the Christian is not in temper for enjoying these purer sweetnesses, the devil hath a fair advantage of starting some creature enjoyment, and presenting it before the Christian, which the flesh soon scents and carries the poor Christian after it till grace comes a little to its temper, and then he gives over the chase with shame and sorrow.

Secondly, Get above the fear of the world. The fear of man brings a snare. A coward will run into any hole, though ever so dishonourable, so he may save himself from what he fears; and when the holiest are under the power of this temptation, they are too like other men: Abraham, in a pang of fear, dissembles with Abimelech; yea, Peter, when not his life, but his reputation, seemed to be in little danger, did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, he

Digitized by Google

did not foot it right, as became so holy a man to do, but took one step forward, and another back again, as if he had not liked his way; now he will eat with the Gentiles, and anon he withdraws. Now what made him dissemble, and his feet thus double in his going? Nothing but a qualm of fear that came over his heart, as you may see, Gal. ii. 12, compared with ver. 14: 'Fearing them which were of the circumcision,' he dissembled, and drew others into a party with him.

SECTION VI.—Sixthly, and lastly, Keep a strict eye over thy own heart in thy daily walking; hypocrisy is a weed with which the best soil is so tainted, that it needs daily care and dressing to keep it under. He that rides on a stumbler, had need have his eye on his way, and hand on his bridle; such is thy heart, Christian, yea, it oft stumbles in the fairest way, when thou least fearest it; look to it, therefore, and keep a strict rein over it: 'Above all keeping, keep thy heart,' Prov. iv. 23. The servant keeps his way when he travels in his master's company, but when sent off an errand alone, then he hath his vagaries; many a wry step may be prevented, and extravagancy in thy daily walking, didst thou walk in company with thyself, I mean observe thyself and way. In this sense, most in the world are beside themselves, strangers to their own walking, as much as to their own faces; every one that lives with them, knows them better than themselves, which is a horrible shame. And let not so vain an opinion find place with thee, that, because sincere, thou needest not keep so strict an eye over thy heart; as if thy heart which is gracious, could not play false with God and thee too; doth not Solomon brand him on the forehead for a fool, that trusts his own heart? If thou art, as thou sayest, sincere, I cannot believe self-love should so far prevail with thee; they are the ignorant and profane whose hearts are stark naught, that cry them up for good: but it is one part of the goodness of a heart made truly good by grace, to see more into, and complain more of, its own naughtiness. Bring thy heart therefore often upon the review, and take its accounts solemnly; he takes the way to make his servant a thief, that doth not ask him now and then what money he hath in his hand. I read, indeed, of some in good Jehoiada's days that were trusted with the money for the repair of the temple, with whom they did not so much as reckon how they laid it out: 'For they dealt faithfully, 2 Kings xii. 15; but thou hadst not best to do so with thy heart, lest it set thee on score with God and thy own conscience, more than thou wilt get wiped out in haste. Many talents God puts into thy hand, health, liberty, sabbaths, ordinances, communion of saints, and the like, for the repair of thy spiritual temple—the work of grace in thee; ask now thy soul, how every one of these are laid out; may be thou wilt find some of this money spent, and the work never a whit the more forward: it stands thee in hand to look to it, for God will have an account, though thou art favourable to thy deceitful heart to call for none.

CHAPTER XV.

COUNSEL AND COMFORT TO THOSE WHO ARE SINCERE, BUT DROOPING, DOUBTING SOULS; WHO NEITHER ARE CONDEMNED ABSOLUTELY IN THEIR CONSCIENCES FOR HYPOCRITES, NOR FULLY ABSOLVED FROM THE SUSPICION OF IT IN THEIR OWN THOUGHTS.

WE have done with the second sort of persons; those, who upon search, find their consciences bearing witness for their uprightness.

Thirdly, There is a third sort remains yet to be spoken to, and they are doubting souls, who are indeed sincere, but dare not be persuaded to think so well of themselves. They come from the trial which they were desired to put themselves upon, and bring in an ignoramus, We know not whether we be sincere or not. Now, to these I would give these words of counsel, and the Lord give his blessing with them.

SECTION I.—1. Take heed Satan doth not draw you to conclude you are hypocrites, because you are without the present evidence of your sincerity. To say so, were to offend against the generations of God's dear children, many of whom must, if this were a true inference from such premises, pass the same sentence upon themselves; for such precious souls there are, from whose eyes the truth of their grace and sincerity of their hearts is at this day hid, and yet

Digitized by Google

are not without either. The patriarchs had their money all day bound up in their sacks as they travelled, though they did not know this till they came to their inn and opened them. Thus there is a treasure of sincerity hid in many a soul, but the time to open the sack, and let the soul know its riches, is not come. Many are now in heaven, have shot the gulf, and are safely landed there, who were sadly tossed with fears all along their voyage about the truth of grace in them. Faith unfeigned puts a soul into the ark Christ; but it doth not hinder but such a one may be sea-sick in the ship. It is Christ's work, not grace's, to evidence itself to our eye so demonstratively as to enable us to own it. Besides an organ fitly disposed, there is required light to irradiate the medium; so, besides truth of grace, it is necessary there be the Spirit, being another light, for want of which the soul is benighted in its thoughts, and must cry for another, and he no other than the Holy Spirit, to lead him into the light. This is the great messenger which alone is able to shew a man his uprightness; but as the eye may be a seeing eye in the dark, when it doth not see anything, there may be truth of grace where there is not present sense of that truth; yea, the creature may be passionately hunting from ordinance to ordinance, to get that sincerity which it already hath; as sometimes you may have seen one seek very earnestly all about the house for his hat, when at the same time he hath it on his head. Well, lay down this as a real truth in thy soul; I may be upright, though at present I am not able to see it clearly; this, though it will not bring in a full comfort, yet it may be some support till that come. As a shore to thy weak house, though it does not mend it, yet it will underprop and keep it standing till the master workman comes, the Holy Spirit, who with one kind word to thy soul is able to set thee right in thy own thoughts, and make thee stand strong on the promise, the only true basis and foundation of solid comfort. Be not more cruel to thy soul, O Christian, than thou wouldst to thy friend's, shall I say, yea, thy enemy's body. Should one thou didst not much love lie sick in thy house, yea, so sick that if you should ask him whether he be alive, he could not tell you, his senses and speech being both at present gone, would you presently lay him out, and coffin him up for the grave, because you cannot have it from his own mouth that he is alive? Surely not. O how unreasonable and bloody then is Satan, who would presently have thee put thyself into the pit-hole of despair, because thy grace is not so strong as to speak for itself at present.

SECTION II.—2. Let me send thee back upon a *melius inquirendum;* look once again more narrowly whether Satan, that Joab, hath not the great hand in these questions and scruples started in thy bosom about thy sincerity, merely as his last design upon thee, that he may amuse and distract thee with false fears, when thou wilt not be flattered with false hopes. The time was thou wert really worse, and then by his means thou thoughtest thyself better than thou wert. And now, since thou hast changed thy way, disowned thy former confidence, been acquainted with Christ, and got some savour of his holy ways in thy spirit, so as to make thee strongly breathe after him, thou art affrighted with many apparitions of fears in thy sad thoughts, if not charging thee for a hypocrite, yet calling in question the truth of thy heart. It is worth, I say, the inquiring whether it be not the same hand again, the devil, though knocking at another door. No player hath so many several dresses to come in upon the stage as the devil hath forms of temptation, and this a suit which he very ordinarily hath been known to wear. If it were thy case only, thou mightest have more suspicion, lest these fears should be the just rebukes of thine own heart; but when thou findest many of thy fellow-brethren, whose sincerity thou darest not doubt, though thou savest not so much charity for thyself, their complaints so meet with thine, that no key, though made on purpose, can more fit all the wards of a lock than their condition doth thine; this, I say, may well make thee set about another search to find whether he be not come forth a lying spirit to abuse thy tender spirit with such news, as he knows worse cannot come to thy ears, that thou dost not love Jesus Christ as thou pretendest, and deceivest but thyself to think otherwise. Thus this foul spirit (like a brazen-faced whore that lays her child at an honest person's door) doth impudently charge many with that which they are little guilty of, knowing that so much will likely stick of his bold accusation to the poor Christian's spirit as shall

Digitized by Google

keep the door open to let in another temptation which he much desires to convey into his bosom by the favour, and under the shadow of this, and it is ordinarily this, to scare the Christian from duty, and knock off the wheels of his chariot, which used so often to carry him into the presence of God in his ordinances, merely upon a suspicion that he is not sincere in them, and better stay at home without hearing, or joining with God's people in any other duty, than go up and shew the naughtiness of thy heart, saith the devil. Had the serpent a smoother skin, and a fairer tale, when he made Eve put forth her hand to the forbidden fruit, than he comes with in this temptation, to persuade the poor Christian not to touch or taste of that fruit which God hath commanded to be eaten, ordinances, I mean, to be enjoyed by thee; yet, Christian, thou hast reason, if I mistake not, to bless God, if he suffers thy enemy so far to open his mind, by which thou mayest have some light to discover the wickedness of his design in the other temptation of questioning thy sincerity. Dost thou not now perceive, poor soul, what made the loud cry of thy hypocrisy in thy ears? The devil did not like to see thee so busy with ordinances, nor thy acquaintance to grow so fast with God in them; and he knew no way but this to knock thee off. Bite at his other baits thou wouldst not: sin, though never so well cooked and garnished, is not a dish for thy tooth, he sees; and therefore either he must affright thee from these by troubling thy imagination with fears of thy hypocrisy in them, or else he may throw his cap at thee, and give thee for one got out of his reach. Dost shou think, poor soul, that if thy heart were so false and hypocritical in thy duties that he would make all this bustle about them; He doth not use to misplace his batteries thus, to mount them where there is no enemy to offend him; thy hypocritical prayers and hearing would hurt him no more than if none at all. Neither doth he use to be so kind as to tell hypocrites of the falseness of their hearts: this is the chain with which he hath them by the foot, and it is his great care to hide it from them, lest the rattling of it in their conscience awaken them to some endeavour to knock it off, and so they make an escape out of his prison. Be therefore of good comfort, poor soul; if thy conscience brings not Scripture proof to condemn thee for a hypocrite, fear not the devil's charge; he shall not be on the bench when thou comest to be tried for thy life, nor his testimony of any value at that day: why then should his tongue be any slander to thee now?

Section III.—3. Neglect no means for the getting thy truth of heart and sincerity evidenced to thee; it is to be had. This is the 'white stone with the new name in it, which no man knoweth but he that receives it,' promised Rev. ii. 17. And I hope thou dost not think this to be such an *ens rationis*, an imaginary thing, as the philosopher's stone is, which none could ever say to this day that he had it in his hand. Holy Paul, he had this 'white stone' sparkling in his conscience more gloriously than all the precious stones in Aaron's breastplate, 2 Cor. i. 12: 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, we have had our conversation in the world.' And Job, sure, was not without it, when he durst with such a confidence appeal to the thoughts that God himself had of him; even then when God was ransacking and searching every corner of his heart by his heavy hand, Job x. 7: 'Thou knowest that I am not wicked.' Mark, he doth not deny he had sin in him, that you have again and again confessed by him, but that he was 'not wicked,' *i. e.*, a rotten-hearted hypocrite; this he will stand to, that God himself will not say so of him; though, for his trial, the Lord gives way to have him searched, to stop the devil's mouth, and shame him, who was not afraid to lay suspicion of this spiritual felony to his charge.

Obj. But may be thou wilt say, These were saints of the highest form, and though they might come to see their sincerity, and have this 'white stone' in their bosoms, yet such jewels cannot be expected to be worn by ordinary Christians.

Ans. For answer to this, consider, that the weakest Christian in God's family hath the same witness in him that those had, 1 John v. 10: 'He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in him.' Mark, it is indefinite, 'every one that believeth;' not this eminent Christian, or that, but every one. 'The witness,' the same Christ and Spirit dwell in thy heart, that do in the highest saint on earth; the same blood thou hast to sprinkle, and the same water

Digitized by Google

to wash thee; these can, and will, when the Lord pleases, testify as much for thy grace and sincerity as it doth for theirs. Only as witnesses that are in a court stay till the judge call them forth, then, and not till then, do they give their testimony; so do these, and God may, and doth use his liberty, when he will do this; as, on the contrary, every wicked impenitent sinner carries a witness in his own bosom that will condemn him; but this doth not alwys speak, and presently make report of the sad news it hath to tell the sinner, that is when God calls a court, and keeps his private sessions in the sinner's soul, which is at his pleasure to appoint the time. Only means must not be neglected, of which I shall propose a few.

1. Reach forth, Christian, for such I must call thee, whether thou wilt own the name or no, to further degrees of grace. The more the child grows up, the more it comes to its right complexion; and so doth grace. There is so much slavish fear, selfishness, with other imperfections, at present, like so much scruf, on the face of this new born babe of grace, that they do hide its true favour, which by degrees will wear off as it grows up; yea the spiritual reason of a Christian ripens, as the whole body of grace grows, whereby he is more capable, by reflecting on his own actions, to judge of the objections Satan makes against his sincerity; so that if you would not be always tossed to and fro with your own fluctuating thoughts, whether sincere or not, be not always children in grace, but grow up to higher stature, and thou wilt grow above many of thy fears; for, by the same light that thou findest the growth of thy grace thou mayest see the truth of it also. Though it be hard in the *crepusculum*, or first break of day, to know whether it be daylight or nightlight that shines; yet when you see the light evidently grow and unfold itself, you by that know it to be day. Paint doth not grow on the face fairer than it was, nor do the arms of a child in a picture get strength by standing there months and years; does thy love, hope, humility, godly sorrow, grow more and more, poor soul, and yet question what it is, whether true grace or not? This is as marvellous a thing, that thou shouldest not know what thy grace is, and whence, as it was that the Jews should not know who Christ was, when he had made a man, born blind, see so clearly, John ix.

2. Readily embrace any call that God sends thee by his providence for giving a proof and experiment of thy sincerity. There are some few advantages that God gives, which, if embraced and improved, a man may come to know more of his own heart, and the grace of God therein, than in all his life besides. Now these advantages do lie wrapped up in those seasons wherein God more eminently calls us forth to deny ourselves for his sake. Be but ready to entertain, and faithful to obey that heavenly call, and thou wilt know much of thy heart; partly, because grace in such acts comes forth with such glory, that as the sun when it shines in a clear day, it exposeth itself more visibly to the eye of the creature, as also because God chooseth such seasons as these for to give his testimony to the truth of his children's grace in, when they are most eminently exercising of it in this way. When does the master speak kindly to his servant, and commend him, but when he takes him most diligent in it? then he saith: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' May be some time or other God is calling thee to such an act of self-denial, wherein if thou wilt answer God's call, thou must trample upon some dear enjoyment or other, as credit, estate, may be a sweet child, a dear wife, yea, may be thou canst not do the work God calls thee to, but with hazard to them all, these and more too. Well, friend, be not sick to think of thy great strength, or disquieted at the sight of his providence, that now stands at thy door; didst thou know what errand it comes about, thou wouldst invite it in, and make it as welcome as Abraham did the three angels, whom he feasted in his tent so freely. I will tell thee what God sends it for; and that is, to bring thee to a sight of thy sincerity, and acquaint thee with that grace of God in thee, whose face thou hast so long desired to see. This providence brings thee a chariot, to allude to Joseph's waggons sent for old Jacob, wherein thou mayest be carried to see that grace alive, whose funeral thou hast so long kept in thy mournful soul; and does not thy spirit revive at the thought of any means whereby thou mayest obtain this? Abraham, he was called to offer up his son, and went about it in earnest: such a piece of self-denial God could not let pass without some mark of honour: and what is it he gives him,

Digitized by Google

but his testimony to his uprightness? Gen. xxii. 12: 'Lay not thy hand upon the lad, for now I know thou fearest me, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son, from me.' Why, God knew this before; yes, but he speaks it that Abraham may hear, and take it from God's mouth that he was sincere. May be thou art called to deny thy own education, and principles sucked in by it; thy own company; cross the judgment of those thou highly esteemest; yea, thy own wisdom and reason; to entertain a truth, or take up a practice merely upon the account of the word; which if thou canst do, and that without affectation of singularity, or a humour of pride blowing thee that way, it is an act of deep self-denial, and goes most cross to the most ingenious natures, who are afraid of drawing eyes after them, by leaving their company to walk in a path alone; yea, very loth to oppose their judgment to others, more for number and parts than their own; in a word, who love peace so dearly, that they can be willing to pay anything but a sin to purchase it; in these it must needs be great self-denial, and therefore such as have the greater ground to expect God's evidencing their sincerity to them. He did it to Nathanial, who had all these bars to keep him from coming to Christ, and believing on him; yet he did both, and Christ welcomes him with a high and loud testimony to his uprightness: 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile,' John i. 47. May be again, the thing God would have thee deny thyself in, is thy wrath, and revenge, which to give thee a fair occasion to do, with the greater demonstration of thy sincerity, he puts thy enemy into thy power, and lays him bound as it were under thy hand; yea, so orders it in his providence, that thou mayest have thy will on him with little noise; or if it be known, yet the notorious wrongs he hath done thee, and some circumstances in the providence that hath brought him into thy hand, concur to give thee an advantage of putting so handsome a colour upon the business as shall apologise for thee in the thoughts of those that hear of it; making them especially who look not narrowly into the matter, rather observe the justice of God on the enemy's judgment befallen him, than thy injustice and sin, who was the instrument to execute it. Now, when the way lies smooth and fair for thee to walk in, and thy own corruption calls thee forth, yea, useth God's name in the matter, to make thee more confident, saying to thee, as they to David, 1 Sam. xxiv.: 'Behold, the day is come, wherein God hath delivered thy enemy into thy hand, that thou mayest do to him as seemeth good in thine eyes:' now if thou canst withstand the temptation, and instead of avenging thyself upon the person, thy enemy, revenge thyself on thy revenge, thy greater enemy of the two, by paying good into thy adversary's bosom for the evil he hath done thee; and when thou hast done this, canst escape another enemy in thy return, I mean pride, so as to come out of the field a humble conqueror, and consecrate the memorial of this victory, not to thy own, but praise of God's name, (as Goliath's sword, which was not kept by David at his own home, to shew what he had done, but in the tabernacle behind the ephod, as a memorial of what God had done by it in David's hand, 1 Sam. xxi. 9;) thou hast done that which speaks thee sincere, yea, high graduate in this grace, and God will sooner or later let thee know so. David's fame sounds not louder for his victories got in the open field, over his slain enemies, than it doth for that he got in the cave, though an obscure hole, over his own revenge, in sparing the life of Saul, in which you have the case in hand every way fitted. By the renown of his bloody battles, he got 'a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth,' 2 Sam. vii. 9; but by this noble act of self-denial he got a name, great, like unto the name of those that are famed for their holiness in the Scripture; and rather than David shall not have the commendation of this piece of self-denial, God will send it to him in the mouth of his very enemy, who cannot hold, though by it he proclaims his own shame and wickedness, but he must justify him as a holy, righteous man, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17: 'And he,' that is, Saul, 'said unto David, Thou art more righteous than I: thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.'

3. Continue thou to wait upon God in all the ways of his ordinances, every one in their season; whenever thou comest to get the comfortable sight of thy sincerity, it is the Spirit of God that must befriend thee in it, or else, like Hagar, thou mayest sit by the well, and not find it; thou mayest round thy field again and again, but not find the treasure hid in it. It is the Spirit of God

Digitized by Google

by which 'we know the things that are freely given us of God,' 1 Cor. ii. 12. Now the Spirit sits in the ordinances, as a minister of state in his office, whether we must resort, if we will have the truth of our graces, that are our evidences for heaven, sealed to our consciences. Thither go, therefore, yea, there wait, for thou knowest not, as the wise man saith of sowing seed, Eccles. xi. 6, whether thy waiting on this or that, now or then, shall prosper and be successful to thee for this end. It is enough to confirm, yea, quiet and comfort thee in thy attendance, that thou art at the right door, and though thou knockest long, and hearest no news of his coming, yet thou canst not stay so long, like Eglon's servants, Judg. iii. 25, that thou needest be ashamed. They, indeed, waited on a dead man, and might have stood long enough before he had heard them; but thou on a living God, that hears every knock thou givest at heaven-gate with thy prayers and tears; yea, a loving God, that all this while he acts the part of a stranger, like Joseph to his brethren, yet is so big with mercy that he will at last fall on thy neck, and ease his heart, by owning of thee, and his grace in thee. Lift up thy head, then, poor drooping soul, and go with expectation of the thing, but remember thou settest not God the time. The sun riseth at its own hour, whatever time we set it. And when God shall meet thee in an ordinance, as sometimes, no doubt, Christian, thou findest a heavenly light irradiating, and influence quickening thy soul while hearing the word, or may be on thy knees wrestling with God, this is a sweet advantage and season thou shouldst improve for the satisfying thy soul; as when the sun breaks out, then we run to the dial to know how the day goes; or when, as we are sitting in the dark, one brings a candle into the room, then we bestir ourselves to look for the thing we miss, and soon find what we in vain groped for in the dark; so mayest thou, poor soul, as many of thy dear brethren and sisters before thee have done, know more of thy spiritual state in a few moments at such a time, than in many a day when God withdraws. Carefully, therefore, watch for such seasons, and improve them; but if God will hide thy treasure from thy sight, comfort thyself with this, God knows thy uprightness, though wrapped up from thine own eye; say as David, Psa. cxlii. 3: 'When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.' And God will deal with thee, not by the false accusations thou bringest in against thyself, as it is to be feared some have suffered at men's hands, but by the testimony which his all-seeing eye can give to thy grace.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN THE SECOND REASON OF THE METAPHOR IS OPENED; WHY SINCERITY IS SET OUT BY THE SOLDIER'S BELT, VIZ., FROM THE ESTABLISHING AND STRENGTHENING NATURE OF THIS GRACE, PARTICULARLY OF A PRESERVING STRENGTH IT HATH; WITH SOME SPECIAL SEASONS WHEREIN THE HYPOCRITE FALLS OFF.

HAVING despatched the first reason why sincerity is compared to the soldier's girdle or belt, and discoursed of this grace under that notion, we proceed to the second ground or reason of the metaphor, taken from the other use of the soldier's girdle, which is to strengthen his loins, and fasten his armour, over which it goes, close to him, whereby he is more able to march, and strong to fight. Girding, in Scripture phrase, imports strength, Psa. xviii. 39: 'Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle.' Job xii. 21: 'He weakeneth the strength of the mighty;' in the Hebrew it is, 'He looseth their girdle;' to which use of the girdle sincerity doth bear a fit analogy. It is a grace that establisheth and strengthens the Christian in his whole course: as, on the contrary, hypocrisy weakens and unsettles the heart: 'a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.' As it is in bodies, so in souls. Earthly bodies, because mixed, are corruptible; whereas the heavenly bodies, being simple and unmixed, they are not subject to corruption. So much a soul hath of heaven's purity and incorruptibleness, as it hath of sincerity. 'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,' with incorruption, Eph. vi. 24. The strength of every grace lies in the sincerity of it; so that, without any more ado, the point which offers itself to our consideration, from this second notion of the girdle, is this:

Digitized by Google

Note, That sincerity doth not only cover all our other infirmities, but is excellent, yea, necessary to establish the soul in, and strengthen it for its whole Christian warfare. 'The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them,' Prov. xi. 3. The hypocrite falls shamefully, and comes to naught, with all his shifts and stratagems to save himself; whereas sincerity carries that soul safe, that dares follow its conduct above all dangers, though in the midst of them. But to open the point, there is a threefold strength sincerity brings with it, which the false, hypocritical heart wants. 1. A preserving strength. 2. A recovering strength. 3. A comforting strength.

First, Sincerity hath a preserving strength to keep the soul from the defilements of sin: when temptation comes on furiously, and chargeth the soul home, a false heart is put to the run, it cannot possibly stand. We are told of Israel's hypocrisy, Psa. lxviii. 8; they were a generation that 'set not their heart aright:' and what follows? 'whose spirit was not stedfast with God.' Stones that are not set right on the foundation cannot stand strong or long: you may see more of this bitter fruit growing on the hypocrite's branches in the same Psalm, ver. 56, 57: 'They turned back, and dealt unfaithfully; they were turned aside like a deceitful bow;' when the bow is unbent, the rift it hath may be undiscerned, but go to use it by drawing the arrow to the head, and it flies in pieces; thus doth a false heart, when put to the trial. As the ape in the fable, drest like a man, when nuts are thrown before her, cannot then dissemble her nature any longer, but shews herself an ape indeed; a false heart betrays itself before it is aware, when a fair occasion is presented for its lust; whereas sincerity keeps the soul pure in the face of temptation, Prov. x. 8: 'He that walketh uprightly walketh surely;' that is, he treads strong on the ground, like one whose feet are sound; though stones lie in his way, he goes over them safely; 'but he that perverteth his way shall be known;' like one that hath some corn or other ail about his feet, though in green, smooth way, he may make a shift to go, yet when he meets with hobbling, stony way, he presently comes down and falters. Now that this preserving strength, which sincerity girds the soul with, may better appear, it will be requisite to instance in some of those seasons wherein sincerity keeps the soul from the power of temptation; as, on the contrary, when hypocrisy cowardly and tamely yields the soul up into its hands.

First, A false heart usually starts aside, and yields to sin, when it can hide itself in a crowd, and have store of company, under which it may shroud itself. The hypocrite sets his watch, not by the sun, the word, I mean, but by the town-clock; what most do, that he will be easily persuaded to do; *vox populi* is his *vox Dei*: therefore you seldom have him swim against the tide of corrupt times; light things are carried by the stream, and light spirits by the multitude. But the sincere Christian is massy and weighty; he will sooner sink to the bottom, and yield to the fury of a multitude by suffering from them, than float after their example in sinning with them. The hypocrite hath no inward principle to act him, and therefore, like the dead fish, must drive with the current; but sincerity, being a principle of divine life, directs the soul to its way, and improves it to walk in it, without the help of company to lean on, yea, against any opposition it meets. Joshua spake what was in his heart, when ten or twelve that were sent with him, perceiving on which side the wind lay, accommodated themselves to the humour of the people, Numb. xiv. 7. The false prophets' pleasing words, with which they clawed Ahab's proud humour, could by no means be brought to fit good Micaiah's mouth, though he should make himself very ridiculous by choosing to stand alone, rather than fall in with so goodly a company, 'four hundred prophets,' who were all agreed of their verdict, 1 Kings xx.

Secondly, A false heart yields when sin comes with a bribe in its hand: none but Christ, and such as know the truth as it is in Jesus, can scorn the devil's offer, *Omnia hæc dabo*, 'All these will I give to thee.' The hypocrite, let him be got a pinnacle-high in his profession, yet will make haste down to his prey, if it lies fair before him; one that carries not his reward in his bosom, that counts it not portion enough to have God and enjoy him, may be bought and sold by any huckster, to betray his soul, God, and all. The hypocrite, when he seems most devout, waits but for a better market, and then he will play the merchant

Digitized by Google

with his profession; there is no more difference betwixt a hypocrite and an apostate, than betwixt a green apple and a ripe one; come a while hence, and you will see him fall rotten ripe from his profession. Judas, a close hypocrite, how soon an open traitor? And as fruit ripens sooner or later, as the heat of the year proves, so doth hypocrisy, as the temptation is strong or weak; some hypocrites go longer before they are discovered than others, because they meet not with such powerful temptations to draw out their corruptions. It is observed, that the fruits of the earth ripen more in a week, when the sun is in conjunction with the dog-star, than in a month before: when the hypocrite hath a door opened by which he may enter into possession of that wordly prize he hath been projecting to obtain, now his lust within and the occasion without are in conjunction, and his day hastens wherein he will fall. The hook is baited, and he cannot but nibble at it. Now sincerity preserves the soul in this hour of temptation. David prays, Psa. xxvi. 9, that God would 'not gather his soul with sinners, whose right hand is full of bribes;' such as, for advantage, would be bribed to sin, to which wicked gang he opposeth himself, ver. 11: 'But as for me, I will walk in my integrity;' where he tells us what kept him from being corrupted and enticed, as they were, from God—it was his integrity. A soul walking in its integrity will take bribes neither from men, nor sin itself; and therefore he saith, ver. 12, 'His foot stood in an even place;' or, as some read it, 'My foot standeth in righteousness.'

Thirdly, The hypocrite yields to the temptation, when he may sin without being controlled by man, which falls out in a double case: first, when he may embrace his lust in a secret corner, where the eye of man is not privy to it; secondly, when the greatness of his place and power lifts him above the stroke of justice from man's hand: in both these he discovers his baseness, but sincerity preserves the soul in both.

First, See how the hypocrite behaves himself when he thinks he is safe from man's sight. Ananias and Sapphira's care was to blind man's eye, by laying some of their estates at the apostles' feet; and having made sure of this, as they thought, by drawing this curtain of their seeming zeal between it and them, they pocket up the rest without trembling at, or thinking of God's revenging eye looking on them all the while; and boldly, when they have done this, present themselves to Peter, as if they were as good saints as any in the company. The hypocrite stands more of the saving of his credit in this world, than the saving of his soul in the other, and, therefore, when he can insure that, he will not stick to venture the putting of the other to the hazard; which shews he is either a flat atheist, and doth not believe there is another world to save or damn his soul in; or, on purpose, stands aloof from the thoughts of it, knowing it is such a melancholy subject, and inconsistent with the way he is in, that he dares not suffer his own conscience to tell him what it thinks of it; and so it comes to pass, that it hath no power to awe and sway him, because it cannot be heard to speak for itself. Now sincerity preserves the soul in this case. It was not enough that Joseph's master was abroad, so long as his God was present: 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Gen. xxxix. 8. Mark, not against his master, but 'against God.' Sincerity makes faithful to man, but for more than man's sake; Joseph served his master with eye-service—he had God in his eye when Potiphar had not him in his; happy are those masters that have any that will serve them with this eye-service of sincerity.

Secondly, The hypocrite, if he cannot get out of man's sight, yet may he but stand out of the reach of his arm and power, it is as well for his turn, and doth often discover him. How unworthily and cruelly dealt Laban with Jacob, cheating him in his wife, oppressing him in his wages, by changing it ten times! Alas! he knew Jacob was a poor, shiftless creature, in a strange place, unable to contest with him, a great man in his country. Some princes, who before they have come to their power and greatness have seemed humbled and courteous, kind and merciful, just and upright, as soon as they have leaped into the saddle, got the reins of government into their hand, and begun to know what their power was, have even ridden their subjects off their legs with oppression and cruelty, without all mercy, to their estates, liberties, and lives. Such instances the history of the world doth sadly abound with; even Nero himself, that played the part of a devil at last, began so, that in the Roman hopes he

Digitized by Google

was hugged for a state saint. Set but hypocrisy upon the stage of power and greatness, and it will not be long before its masks falls off. The prophet meant thus much, when he made only this reply to Hazael's seeming abhorency of what he had foretold concerning him, 2 Kings viii. 23: 'The Lord shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria;' as if he had said, Hazael, thou never yet did sit in a king's chair, and knowest not what a discovery that will make of thy deceitful heart. Mark from whence Rehoboam's revolt from God is dated, 2 Chron. xii. 1: 'It came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the Lord.' Policy bade him conceal his intentions, while he had settled himself on his throne, lest he should have hazarded his crown; but that set on sure, and his party made strong, now all breaks out; like a false captain, who victuals his castle, and furnishes it with all kind of provision and ammunition, and then, and not till then, declares himself a traitor, when he thinks he is able to defend his treason. But here also sincerity preserves the gracious soul. Two famous instances we have for this: one in Joseph, who had his unnatural brethren, that would once have taked away his life,—yea, who did that which might have proved worse, for all that they knew, barbarously sell him as a slave into a strange land—these he had strangely brought into his hands, while he was in all his honour and power in Egypt; and now, when he might have paid them in their own coin, without any fear or control from man, behold, this holy man is lift above all thoughts of revenge; he pays their cruelty in his own tears, not in their blood; he weeps over them for joy to see them, that once had no joy till they had rid their hands of him; yea, when their own guilt made them afraid of his presence, measuring him by their own revengeful hearts, who soon doth he deliver them from all fears of any evil intended by him against them; yea, he will not allow them to darken the joy which that day had with them brought to him, so much as by expressing their own grief before him, for their own cruelty to him, so perfect a conquest had he got of all revenge, Gen. xlv. 5. And what preserved him in his hour of great temptation? He told them, Gen. xlii. 18:| 'This do and live, for I fear God;' as if he had said, Though you be here my prisoners at my will and mercy, for all that you can do to resist, yet I have that which binds my hands and heart too, from doing or thinking you evil, 'I fear God.' This was his preservative; he sincerely feared God. The other instance is Nehemiah, governor of that colony of Jews, which, under the favour of the Persian princes, were again planting their native country. By his place he had an advantage of oppressing his brethren, if he durst have been so wicked; and from those that had before him been honoured with that office, he had examples of such as could not only swallow the common allowance of the governor, without rising in their consciences, which shewed a digestion strong enough, considering the peeled state of the Jews at that time, but could, when themselves had sucked the milk, let their cruel servants suck the blood of this poor people also by illegal exactions; so that Nehemiah, coming after such oppressors, if he had taken his allowance, and but eased them of the other burdens which they groaned under, no doubt he might have passed for merciful in their thoughts; but he durst not go so far. A man may possibly be an oppressor in exacting his own. Nehemiah knew they were not in case to pay, and therefore he durst not require it. But as one who comes after a bad husbandman that hath driven his land, and sucked out the heart of it, casts it up fallow for a time till it recovers its lost strength, so did Nehemiah spare this oppressed people; and what, I pray, was it preserved him from doing as the rest had done? see Nehem. v. 15: 'But I did not so, because of the fear of the Lord.' The man was honest, his heart touched with a sincere fear of God, and this kept him right.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF A RECOVERING STRENGTH THAT SINCERITY HATH, AND WHENCE.

Secondly, Sincerity hath a recovering strength with it. When it doth not privilege from falling, yet it helps up again; whereas the hypocrite lies where he falls, and perisheth where he lies; who, therefore, is said 'to fall into mischief,' Prov. xxiv. 16. The sincere soul falls as a traveller may do, by stumbling at some stone in his path, but gets up, and goes on his way with more care and

Digitized by Google

speed; the other falls as a man from the top of a mast, that is engulfed, past all recovering, in the devouring sea. He falls, as Haman did before Mordecai; when he begins, he stays not, but falls till he can fall no lower. This we see in Saul, whose heart was never right; when once his naughty heart discovered itself, he tumbled down the hill apace, and stopped not, but from one sin went to a worse; and in a few years you see how far he was got from his first stage, where he first took his leave of God. He that should have told Saul, when he betrayed his distrust and unbelief, in not staying the full time for Samuel's coming, which was the first wry step taken notice of in his apostacy, that he who now was so hot for the worship of God that he could not stay for the prophet's coming, would ere long quite give it over, yea, fall from inquiring of the Lord, to ask counsel of the devil, by seeking to a witch, and from seeking counsel of the devil should, at the last and worst act of his bloody tragedy, with his own hands throw himself desperately into the devil's mouth by self-murder,—surely he would have wondered at it more than Hazael did at the plain character Elisha gave of him to his face. And truly all the account we can give of it is, that his heart was naught at first, which Samuel on that occasion hinted to him, 1 Sam. xiii., when he told him, 'The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart;' David he meant, who afterward fell into a sin greater, as to the matter of the fact, than that for which Saul was rejected of God, and yet having but an habitual sincerity, as the 'root of the matter in him,' happily recovered out of it; for want of which hypocritical Saul miscarried finally: so true is that proverb, that 'frost and fraud have dirty ends.' Now there is a double reason for this recovering strength of sincerity; one taken from the nature of sincerity itself, the other from the promise by God settled on the soul where sincerity is found.

First, From the nature of sincerity itself. Sincerity is to the soul as the soul is to the body; it is a spark of divine life kindled in the bosom of the creature by the Spirit of God: it is 'the seed of God remaining' in the saint, 1 John iii. 9. Now, as the seed cast into the womb of the earth, and quickened there by the influence of heaven upon it, doth put forth its head fresh and green in the spring, after many a cold nip it hath had from the winter; so doth sincere grace after temptations and falls, when God looks out upon it with the beams of his exciting grace: but the hypocrite, wanting this inward principle of life, doth not so; he is a Christian by art, not by a new nature, dressed up like a puppet, in the fashion and outward shape of a man, that moves by the jimmers which the workman fastens to it, and not informed by a soul of its own; and therefore as such an image, when worn by time, or broken by violence, can do nothing to renew itself, but crumbles away by piecemeals till it comes at last to nothing, so doth the hypocrite waste in his profession without a vital principle to oppose his ruin that is coming upon him. There is great difference between the wool on the sheep's back, which, shorn, will grow again, and the wool of the sheep's skin on a wolf's back; clip that, and you shall see no more grow in its room. The sincere Christian is the sheep, the hypocrite is the wolf clad in the sheep's skin; the application of it is obvious.

Secondly, The sincere soul is under a promise, and promises are restorative: Psa. xix. 7, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;' in Hebrew, 'restoring the soul.' It fetcheth back the soul to life, as a strong cordial one in a fainting fit, which virtue is proper to the promissory part of the word, and therefore so to be taken in this place. Now the sincere soul is the only rightful heir of the promises. Many sweet promises are laid in for the assuring succour and auxiliary aid to bring them off in all their dangers and temptations: Prov. xxviii. 18, 'Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved.' Now mark the opposition, 'but he that is perverse shall fall at one;' that is, suddenly, irrecoverably. Job viii. 20: 'God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evildoers;' he will not take them by the hand, (Heb.,) that is, to help them up when they fall; nay, the hypocrite is not only destitute of a promise for his help, but lies also under a curse from God. Great pains we find him take to rear his house, and when he hath done, 'leans on it, but it shall not stand: he holds it fast, but it shall not endure,' Job viii. 15. 'A little that the righteous hath is better than the riches of many wicked,' Psa. xxxvii. 16. But why? See the reason, ver. 17: 'For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord

Digitized by Google

upholdeth the righteous.' The righteous man in that psalm is the upright; by the wicked is meant the hypocrite. A little true grace mixed with much corruption in the sincere Christian is better than the hypocrite's riches, great faith, zeal, and devotion he brags so of. The former hath the blessing of the promise to recover it when decaying; these, the curse of God threatening to blast them when in their greatest pomp and glory. The hypocrite's doom is to grow 'worse and worse,' 2 Tim. ii. 13. Those very ordinances which are effectual, through the blessing of the promise, to recover the sincere soul, being cursed to the hypocrite, give him his bane and ruin. The word, which opens the eyes of the one, puts out the eyes of the other: as we find in the hypocritical Jews, to whom the word was sent to 'make them blind,' Isa. vi. 9, 10. It melts and breaks the sincere soul, as in Josiah, 2 Kings xxii. 19; but meeting with a naughty false heart, it hardens exceedingly, as appeared in the same Jews, Jer. lxii. 20. Before the sermon they speak fair, 'Whatever God saith they will do;' but when sermon is done, they are further off than ever from complying with the command of God. The hypocrite he hears for the worse, prays for the worse, fasts for the worse; every ordinance is a wide door to let Satan in more fully to possess him, as Judas found the sop.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF A SUPPORTING AND COMFORTING PROPERTY SINCERITY HATH, SHEWN IN SEVERAL PARTICULAR INSTANCES.

THIRDLY, Sincerity hath a supporting, comforting virtue; it lifts the head above water, and makes the Christian float a-top of the waves of all troubles with a holy presence and gallantry of spirit: Psa. xi. 24, 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in darkness;' not only light after darkness, when the night is past, but in darkness also: 'Out of the eater comes meat, and out of the strong, sweetness.' Those afflictions which feed on, yea, eat out the hypocrite's heart, the sincere soul can feed on them, suck sweetness from them, yea, hath such a digestion that he can turn them into high nourishment both to his grace and comfort. A naughty heart is merry only while his carnal cheer is before him. Hosea ii. 11, God tells Israel, 'He will take away her feasts, and all her mirth shall cease;' her joy is taken away with the cloth. Sincerity makes the Christian sing when he hath nothing to his supper. David was in none of the best case when in the cave, yet we never find him merrier; his heart makes sweeter music than ever his harp did: Psa. lvii. 7, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.' The hypocrite's joy, like the strings of musical instruments, crack in wet weather; but sincerity keeps the soul in tune in all weather. They are unsound bodies that sympathize with the season,—cheerly in fair, but ill and full of aches in foul; so the unsound heart; a few pinching providences set him going, kill him, as a sharp winter doth weak bodies; whereas the sincere soul never is more hail, never more comfortable. Afflictions do him but this courtesy, to call in his affections, which in the summer of prosperity were possibly too much diffused and scattered among creature delights, and unite them more entirely and closely upon Christ, into whose bosom it goes as directly, when storms come, as the bee to its hive; and he must needs be comfortable that hath so soft a pillow to lay his head on as Christ's lap. Sincerity keeps the soul's mouth open to receive the sweet consolations that drop from word and Spirit; indeed all the promises are directed to such. But hypocrisy is like the quinsy in the throat of a sick man, he burns within, and can get nothing down to quench the fire which his sins have kindled in his soul. Conscience tells him, when the sweet promises are offered, These are not for me, I have dealt falsely with God and man; it is the sincere soul God invites, but I am a rotten-hearted hypocrite: and how much short comes such a poor wretch of Dives' misery in hell, I pray? Dives burns, and hath not a drop to quench his tongue; the hypocrite in affliction he burns too, and hath indeed, not a drop, but a river, a fountain full of water, yea, of blood, presented to him, but he cannot drink it down, he cannot make any use of it for his good; his teeth are set so close, no key can open them; his hypocrisy stares him in the face; it lies like a mastiff at his door, and will suffer no comfort to come near him. And which is worse, he that hath no bread, or he that

Digitized by Google

hath and cannot eat it? None so witty and cunning as the hypocrite in prosperity to ward off the reproofs, to shift from the counsels of the word; and in affliction, when conscience awakes, none so skilful to dispute against the comforts of the word. Now he is God's close prisoner no comfort can come at him; if God speak terror, who can speak peace? Lam. iii. 65: 'Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them.' Sorrow of heart is the hypocrite's curse from God in affliction, and what God lays on sticks close. The word for sorrow in the Hebrew signifies a shield that fenceth, and covers over, and doth, saith one upon this place, denote the disease physicians call *cardiaco passio*, which so oppresseth the heart, that is covered *sicut scuto*, as with a shield or lid over it, and keeps all relief from the heart; such is the sorrow of the hypocrite in affliction, when once his conscience awakes, and God fills him with amazing thoughts of his own sins, and God's wrath pursuing him for them. But I shall descend to instance in a few particular kind of afflictions, and shew what comfort attends sincerity in them all.

SECTION I.—First, Sincerity supports and comforts the soul under reproaches from men. These are no petty trials: they are reckoned among the saints' martyrdoms, Heb. xi. 36, called there cruel mockings; yea, not unworthy to be recorded among the sufferings of Christ; the matchless patience and magnanimity of his spirit appeared not only in enduring the cross, but in despising the shame, which the foul tongues of his bloody enemies loaded him unmercifully with. Man's aspiring mind can least brook shame; credit and applause is the great idol of men that stand at the upper end of the world for parts or place; give but this, and what will not men do or suffer? One wiser than the rest could see this proud humour in Diogenes, that endured to stand naked, embracing a heap of snow while he had spectators about him to admire his patience, as they thought it, and therefore was asked, 'whether he would do thus if he had none to see him.' The hypocrite is the greatest credit-monger in the world, it is all he lives on almost, what the breath of men's praises sends him in; when that fails, his heart faints; but when it turns to scorn and reproaches, then he dies, and needs must, because he has no credit with God, while he is scorned by man; whereas sincerity bears up the soul against the wind of man's vain breath, because it hath conscience and God himself to be his compurgator, to whom he dare appeal from man's bar. O how sweetly do a good conscience, and the Spirit of God witnessing with it, feast the Christian at such a time! and no matter for the hail of men's reproaches that rattle without, while the Christian is so merry within doors. David is a pregnant instance for this, Psa. xli. 11: 'By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me.' How, David, dost not thy enemy triumph over thee? I pray see the condition he at present was in: he had fallen into a great sin, and the hand of God was on him in a disease, chastising him for it, as appears, ver. 4. His enemies from this take advantage to speak him all to naught, ver. 5: 'Mine enemies speak evil of me,' no doubt charging him for a hypocrite. When they come to visit him it is but to gather some matter of reproach, which they presently blab abroad, ver. 6; yea, they are not ashamed to say, ver. 8, that an evil disease, or as it is in the Hebrew, 'a thing of Belial,' that is, his sin, 'cleaveth to him:' now God hath met with him, now he lieth, he shall rise no more; yea, his familiar friend, in whom he trusted, serves him as ill as the worst of his enemies, ver. 9. Was ever poor man lower? and yet can he say his enemy triumphs not over him? His meaning therefore we must take thus: that notwithstanding all these reproaches cast upon him, yet his spirit did not quail; this was above them all; God kept that up, and gave him such an inward comfort, as wiped off their scorn as fast as they threw it on: their reproaches fell, as sometimes we see snow, melting as fast as they fell; none lay upon the spirit to load and trouble it. And how came David by this holy magnanimity of spirit, these inward comforts? Ver. 12, he tells us: 'As for me, thou upholdest me in my integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.' As if he had said, Thou doest not by me, O Lord, as mine enemies do; they pick out my worst, and revile me for it; if there be but one sore plat, one sinful part of my life, like flies they light there; but thou overlookest my sinful slips and failings, pardoning them, and takest notice of my uprightness, which amidst all my infirmities thou upholdest, and so settest me before thy face, communicating thy

Digitized by Google

love and favour to me, notwithstanding the sins that are found mingled with my course of obedience. This kept up the holy man's spirit, and makes him end the psalm joyfully, ver. 13: 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting.' We live, Christians, in reproaching times; he that is so over dainty of his name, that he cannot bear to see some dirt, and that good store too, cast upon his back by reviling tongues, must seek a path to travel in by himself to heaven; but for thy comfort, Christian, sincerity, though it cannot privilege thee from traveller's fare, and keep thee from being dashed with calumnies, yet it will do thee this kind office, that the dirt which lights on thy coat shall not soak into thy soul to damp thy joy, and chill thy inward comfort. Reproaches without may be comfortably endured, yea, triumphantly worn as a crown, if they meet not with a reproaching conscience within. Yea, sincerity will do more than this comes to, it will not only comfort thee under the persecution of the tongue, but hand also; not only quench the fire, which from thence is spit on thy face, by tongues set on fire by hell; but it will comfort thee in the very mouth of fire itself, if God shall suffer thee by persecutors to be cast into it. Sincerity makes thee indeed fearful to sin. O, thou darest not touch one of these coals; but it will make thee bold to burn, and even hail joyfully the flames of martydom when called to them! So little afraid was that sincere servant of Christ, an Italian martyr, Mr. Fox records, among many other undaunted champions of the truth, that when the magistrate of the place where he was to be burned, and the officers of the bishop that condemned him, were in a hot contest, wrangling which of them should pay for the wood that should make the fire for his burning, he presently sent to desire them, 'They would not fall out upon that occasion, for he would take off the burden from them both, and be at the cost himself.' Blessed soul! he made not so much ado of spending his blood and sacrificing his life, as they about a few pence wickedly to procure the same.

Section II.—Secondly, Sincerity girds the soul with comforting strength, when conflicting with affliction from the hand of God. Many are the sorts of affliction with which God exerciseth his sincere servants: to name a few.

First, When the Lord toucheth his outward man by sickness, or his inward man by spiritual conflicts, sincerity is a comfortable companion in both. The hypocrite, above all, fears falling into God's hands, and well he may, for he is able to do him most hurt; therefore no sooner God takes hold of his collar, either of these ways, but his joy gives up the ghost: he, like some murderer, whose doom is writ plain in the law, gives himself for a dead man, when once he is clapped up in a prison. This made Job such a wonder to his wife, because he held up his holy course, when battered so sadly by the afflicting hand of God with renewed afflictions: 'Dost thou yet hold thy integrity?' What! nothing but blows from God's hand, and yet continue to bless him! This was strange to her, but not to him, who could call her foolish woman for her pains, but not charge God foolishly for all he smarted so under his hand. Sincerity enables the Christian to do two things in this case which the hypocrite cannot—to speak good of God, and to expect good from God; and the soul cannot be uncomfortable, though head and heart ache together, which is able to do these.

First, Sincerity enables the Christian to think and speak well of God. A false-hearted hypocrite, his countenance falls, and his heart rises, yea, swells, with venom against God; though he dare not always let it drive out of his mouth, yet he has bloody thoughts against him in his heart. 'Hast thou found me, O my enemy?' saith the wretch. He loves not God, and therefore a good thought of God cannot dwell in his soul. All that God has done for him, though never so bountifully, it is forgotten, and embittered with the overflowing of his gall at the present dealings of God to him; he frets and fumes; you shall hear him sooner curse God than charge himself. But the sincere soul nourisheth most sweet and amiable apprehensions of God, which bind him to the peace, that he dare not think or speak unbesceming the glory or goodness of God, as we see in David, Psa. xxxix. 9: 'I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou, Lord, didst it.' This holy man had a breach made both at his body and spirit at this time; he was sick and sad; yet he remembers from whose hand the blow came: 'Thou, Lord, didst it:' thou, whom I love dearly, and so can take it kindly; thou, whom I have offended, and so take it patiently; yea, thou,

Digitized by Google

who mightest have cast me into a bed of flames, instead of my bed of sickness; and therefore I accept thy correction thankfully. Thus he catches at the blow, without retorting it back upon God, by any quarrelling, discontented language.

Secondly, Sincerity enables the soul to expect good from God, when his hand presseth hardest on body or soul, Psa. xxxviii. Never was David in a worse case for body and soul; it would break a flinty heart to read the sad moans that his throbbing soul makes in the anguish of his flesh and bitter agony of his spirit; one would have thought that they had been the pangs of a soul going away in despair; yet even in this great storm we find him casting out his sheet-anchor of hope, and that takes sure hold of God for mercy, ver. 15: 'In thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.' This expectation of good from God corrects and qualifies the bitterness that is upon his palate from his present sorrow; so Psa. lx. 17: 'I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.' My state at present is sad enough, but my comfort is, I am not cast out of his mind, I know his thoughts are at work to do me good. Holy Job proves that he is not a hypocrite, as his friends uncharitably charged him, by this confidence he had on God in the depth of all his afflictions, Job xiii. 15, 16, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. I will maintain my ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for a hypocrite shall not come before him.' As if he had said, If I were not sincere, I durst not appeal thus to God, and comfortably believe, while God is killing of me, that he would yet save me: 'for a hypocrite shall not come before him;' that is, he dare not thus trust himself in God's hands, and acquiesce in his promise, when his neck is on the block, and God's knife at his throat; no, if he could, he would never come in his sight. His conscience tells him, God knows him too well to intend him any good; and therefore when God begins to lay his hand on him, except his conscience be dead and seared, which is the curse that God now and then brands the gross hypocrite with, he presently hath the scent of hell-fire in his soul, in a fearful expectation thereof; and looks on these present afflictions, though but a cloud of a hand-breadth, as those which will spread further and further, till the shades of that everlasting night overtake and encompass him in hell's utter darkness.

Section III.—Thirdly, Sincerity comforts the Christian when he wants success visibly to crown his endeavours in his place and calling,—a great affliction no doubt to a gracious soul; as when a minister of the gospel spends his strength and wears out his life to a gainsaying people, that sit like stocks and stones under his ministry, no more moved than the seats they sit on, and the pillars they lean to; ignorant and profane he found them, and such, he sees, he is likely to leave them, after twenty years, may be, almost twice told, spent among them. This must needs be a heart-aching trial to one that God hath given a compassionate heart to souls. It costs the mother no small pains to bring forth a living child; but what are the bitter throes of one that travails with a dead child! Such is the travail of a poor minister with a dead-hearted people, yet the portion of none of the meanest of God's messengers; indeed God sets his most eminent servants about the hardest work.

Now sincerity lightens this affliction, and sends in that which may cheer the soul under it. Paul saw he should not carry all to heaven with him he preached unto; to many the gospel was a 'savour of death unto death.' The sweet perfume of the gospel proved a deadly scent to hasten and heighten their damnation; this could not be but sad to so tender a physician, to see his patients die under his hands: yet he thanks God that makes him triumph in Christ, 2 Cor. ii. 14. But how can he do this? Poor souls drop to hell from under his pulpit hearing him, and he triumph! This is as strange as to see the father follow his child's mouraful hearse, not weeping, but singing and dancing, Mark, and the wonder will cease; he doth not triumph that they perish, but that he is not guilty of their blood; not that they are damned, but that he sincerely endeavoured their salvation, ver. 17: 'For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.' Had Paul dropped some wild gourd error into his doctrine, or mingled some ingredient of his own with what Christ, the great Physician, had ordered, he would have had little list to triumph; but preaching pure gospel, and that purely, with a sincere heart, he might triumph in Christ, that made him faithful,

Digitized by Google

and shall triumph over them, when he meets them again at the great day at the bar of Christ, where to their face he shall witness against them, and vote with Christ for their eternal destruction. Methinks I hear all the faithful ministers of Christ giving an account to him, on whose errand they were sent, in the language of Jeremiah's prayer, Jer. xvii. 16: 'Lord, we have not desired this woeful day, thou knowest,' which now hath taken hold of these wretched souls, and which we warned them of; that which came out of our lips, in our preaching to them, was right before thee; the life of their souls was dear and precious to us; we could have sacrificed our temporal lives to save the eternal life of their souls; but nothing we could say or do would stay them; to hell they would go, over all the prayers, tears, and entreaties out of thy word, which stood in their way. This will make the sincere ministers of Christ lift up their head with joy, and such forlorn wretches hang down their heads with shame to look Christ or them in the face, though now they can brazen it out with an impudent forehead. So for parents and masters; sincerity in your relations will comfort you, though you see not your seed come up, which you have sown upon them in your godly examples, holy instructions, and seasonable corrections. David was one that 'walked in his house with a perfect heart,' Psa. ci. 2; careful in the nurture of his children, as appears in his pious council to Solomon, 2 Chron. xxviii. 9, though not without failings. But many of his children were none of the best: one incestuous; another imbruing his hands in his brother's blood; a third catching at his crown traitorously while his father was alive, which made this holy man sadly foresee how the squares would go when he was dead and gone. Yet in this great disorder of his family, how comfortable do we find him on his dying bed. 'Though my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure,' 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. Surely he had done his duty sincerely; this was his evidence for his interest in the covenant, and the covenant was all his desire and salvation.

In a word, in times of public calamity, when the flood of God's wrath comes rolling in upon a nation like waves, irresistibly, at the wide breach which the high crying sins of the times make, and the few righteous that are found upon the place, labour to stand in the gap, by their prayers begging the life of the nation; but God will not hear; for so it sometimes falls out, though they were like Noah, Job, and Daniel, greatly beloved of God, that no bail will be taken for a nation under arrest of God's judgments; even then sincerity will be a sweet support, while we share with others in the common calamity. Jeremiah bestirred him zealously for God, in testifying against the sins of the times, and for the people, faithfully and earnestly with God by prayer; but he could neither convert them by his preaching, nor divert the wrath of God by his praying. The Jews bid him hold his peace, and prophesy no more against them: God stops his mouth also, and bids him pray no more for them. Now in this dismal state of things, what easeth his sorrowful heart, swollen with grief for their sins and judgments hastening upon them, like an eagle to her prey? Truly nothing can, but the remembrance of his sincerity to God and man, in those debauched times, Jer. xviii. 20: 'Remember that I stood up before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them.' As if he had said, O Lord, though I cannot prevail with this rebellious generation to repent of their sins, or with thy majesty, to repent of thy wrath gone out by an irreversible decree against them; yet, remember that I have been faithful in my place both to thee and them. Whereas, on the contrary, horror and amazement of spirit is the portion, in such times of public calamity, of hypocrites, as we see in Pashur, Jer. xx., who was a man that bare great sway at court in Jeremiah's time, a bitter enemy to him, and the message he brought from God to the Jews, labouring to soothe up the king and princess with vain hopes of golden days coming, point-blank against the word of the Lord, in the mouth of Jeremiah; and what becomes of him when the storm falls on that unhappy people? Jeremiah tells him his doom, ver. 4, that God will make him a *Magor Missabib*, a terror to himself; he should not only share in the common calamity, but have a brand of God's especial wrath set upon him above others.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, Sincerity girds the Christian with strength of comfort when deprived of those opportunities which sometimes God had intrusted him

Digitized by Google

with for serving of him,—an affliction, considered in itself so grievous to a gracious soul, that he knows none he fears more; he could choose any, might he be his own carver, before it: to be poor, disgraced, persecuted, anything, rather than be laid aside as a broken instrument, unserviceable to his God. Indeed he values his life, and all the comforts of it, by the opportunities they afford for the glorifying God. David stops the mouth of his soul, which began to whisper some discontented language, with this, that 'he should yet praise God,' Psa. lxii.: 'Why art thou disquieted, O my soul? I shall yet praise him.' All is well with David, and no cause of disquiet in his soul, whatever besides goes cross to him, may he but praise God, and have opportunity of glorifying him. Joseph, when God had so strangely raised him pinnacle-high, as I may say, to honour in a strange land, he doth not bless himself in his preferment, carnally, to think how great a man he is, but interprets the whole series of providence, bringing him at last to that place wherein he stood compeer to a mighty king, to be no other than giving him an opportunity of being eminently serviceable to God in the preservation of his church, which was at that time contained in his father's family. 'God hath sent me hither,' saith he, 'before you, 'to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance,' Gen. xlv. 7. This holy man made his place give place to the work; he was called to do in it for God, counting the honour of his honour to lie in the opportunity he had by it of serving God and his church. It must therefore needs be a sad affliction to a saint when such opportunities are taken from him that at any time he hath enjoyed. But sincerity can make good work of this also, if God will have it so. It is sad to the Christian to be laid aside, but it is comfortable to him to remember, that when he was not, he did not melt his talents away in sloth, or waste them away in riot, but was faithful in improving them for God. He counts it his affliction that God employs him not as he hath done; but he is not sorry that God can do his work without him; yea, it is a sweet comfort to him, as he lives at the grave's mouth, to think that the glory of God shall not go down to the grave with him; though he dies, yet God lives to take care of his own work; and it is not the cracking of one string, or all, that can mar the music of God's providence, who can perform his pleasure without using any creature for his instrument. In a word, it is sad to him to be taken from any work, wherein he might more eminently glorify God; yet this again comforts him, that God counts that done, which the Christian sincerely desires to do. David's good will in desiring to build the temple, was as much in God's account as if he had done it; many shall be, at the last day, rewarded by Christ, for clothing and feeding the poor, who when on earth had neither clothes nor bread to give, yet having had a heart to give, shall be reckoned amongst the greatest benefactors to the poor. This appears from Matt. xxv. 34, where Christ is represented speaking not to some few saints that had great estates to bestow on charitable uses, but to all his saints, poor as well as rich: 'Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you,' &c. 'For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat,' &c. Mark, not—'ye that were rich,' but 'ye,' that is, 'all,' such as had bread, you gave that out; you that had not bread or money to give, when you could not draw out your own purse, you yet drew out your souls to the hungry. Hear this, O ye precious souls that God hath made sincere, and take comfort! May be you stand low in the world, your calling is mean, your estate next to nothing, which makes you little regarded by your neighbours that overtop you. Canst thou say, though thou art but a servant to some poor cobbler, that thou desirest to walk in the truth of thy heart, approving thyself to God in thy whole course? This bird will sing as sweet a note in thy breast, as if thou wert the greatest monarch in the world. That which brings comfort to the greatest saint in a time of distress is the same which comforts the meanest in the family, and that is the love and favour of God, interest in Christ, and the precious promises, which 'in him are Yea and Amen.' Now sincerity is the best evidence for our title to those. It will not be so much insisted on, whether much or little hath been done by us, as whether that much or little were in sincerity. 'Well done, good and faithful servant;' not, well done, thou hast done great things, ruled states and kingdoms, been a famous preacher in thy time, &c., but thou hast been faithful; and that thou mayest be that standest in the obscurest corner of the world. Good

Digitized by Google

Hezekiah knew this, and therefore on his sick bed he doth not tell God of his great services he had done, though none had done more, but only desires God to take notice of the truth and sincerity of his heart: 'Remember that I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight,' Isa. xxxviii. 3.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRIEF APPLICATORY IMPROVEMENT OF THE POINT, BOTH IN GENERAL AND PARTICULAR BRANCHES ALSO.

It remains that the point be applied in its several branches, which were three; sincerity hath a preserving strength, a restoring strength, and a comforting strength. But for quick despatch, we shall do it under two heads, blending the two former into one.

Use 1. First, Therefore hath sincerity a strengthening virtue, whereby it either preserves the soul from falling into sin, or helps the Christian fallen up again.

First, This affords thee, Christian, a further discovery of thy heart, whether sincere or not; put it here upon the trial. Dost thou find a power imparted to thee, whereby thou art enabled to repel a temptation to sin, when thou hast no weapon left thee to defend thee against it, but the command forbidding it, or some arrow taken out of the quiver of the gospel, such as the love of Christ to thee, thy love to him, and the like? May be the temptation is laid so cunningly. that thou mayest sin, and save thy credit too, having a back-door opened to let thee into it secretly. Thou shalt hazard nothing apparently of thy temporal concernment; yea, rather greatly advantage it, if thou wilt hearken to the motion. Only God stands up to oppose it; his Spirit tells it is against his glory, inconsistent with the duty thou owest, and love thou professest to him. Now, speak what thou thinkest of sinning, the case thus stated, canst thou yet stand it out valiantly, and tell Satan, sin is no match for thee, till thou canst have God's consent, and reconcile sinning against him and loving of him together? If so, bless God that hath given thee a sincere heart, and also for opening such a window as this in thy soul, through which thou mayest see that grace to be there, which seen, is the best evidence that God can give thee for thy interest in him, and life everlasting with him. Wert thou a hypocrite, thou couldst no more resist a sin so offered, than powder fire, or chaff the wind.

Again, when thou art run down by the violence of temptation, what is the behaviour of thy soul in this case? Dost thou rally thy routed forces, and again make head against thy enemy, so much the more eagerly, because foiled so shamefully? Or, art thou content to sit down quietly by thy loss, and choose rather to be a tame slave to thy lust, than to be at any further trouble to continue the war? The false heart is soon cowed, and quickly yields subjection to the conqueror; but the sincere Christian gets heart, even when he looseth ground; uprightness makes the soul rebound higher in holy purposes against sin, by its very falls into sin, Job xl. 5: 'Once have I spoken,' he means foolishly, sinfully, 'but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further.' This made holy David beg of God to be 'spared a little that he might have time to recover his strength before he went hence.' Loth was he to go beaten out of the field; might he but live to recover his losses, by repentance of, and some victory over, those sins that had weakened and worsted him, then death should be welcome: like that brave captain, who, wounded in fight, desired some to hold him up, that he might but see the enemy run before he died, and he should close his eyes in peace. Deal, therefore, impartially with thy own soul; which way do thy falls and failings work? If they wear off the edge from thy conscience, that it is not soon keen and sharp in its reproofs for sin; if they bribe thy affections, that thou beginnest to comply with those sins with which formerly thy contest was, and likest pretty well their acquaintance; thy heart is not right; but if still thy heart meditates a revenge on thy sin that hath overpowered thee, and it lies on thy spirit, like undigested meat on a sick stomach, thou canst have no use and content to thy troubled soul, till thou hast cleared thyself of it, as to the reigning power of it; truly then thou discoverest a sincere heart.

Digitized by Google

Use 2. Secondly, This shews of what importance it is to labour for sincerity: without it we can neither stand against, nor rise when we fall into temptation. Whatever thou beggest of God, forget not a sincere heart. David saw need of more of this grace than he had, Psa. li. 10: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew in me a right spirit;' and happy was it for him he had so much as to make him desire more of it. What folly is it to build a house with beams on fire! The hypocrite's building must needs come to nought. There is a fire unquenched, the power of hypocrisy unmortified, that will consume all his goodly profession. He carries into the field a heart that will deliver him up into his enemies' hands; and he is sure to be overcome to whom his own side is not true.

Use 3 Thirdly, Bless God, O sincere Christian, for this grace: it is a blessing invaluable: crowns and diadems are not to be compared with it. In this thou hast 'a heart after God's own heart;' a heart to his liking; yea, a heart to his likeness. Nothing makes thee more like God in the simplicity and purity of his nature, than sincerity. Truth is that God glories in; he is a God of truth. When Haman was bid to say what should be done to the man that the king delighted to honour, he, thinking the king meant no other than himself, would fly as high as his ambition could carry him; and what doth he choose, but to be clothed with the king's own apparel royal? When God gives thee sincerity, he clothes thy soul with that which he wears himself; 'Who clothes himself with truth and righteousness as a garment.' By this thou art made a conqueror, greater than even Alexander was: he overcame a world of men, but thou a world of lusts and devils. Did one bless God at the sight of a toad, that God made him a man, and not a toad, how much more thankful oughtest thou to be to God who hath made thee, that wert a hypocrite by nature, which is far worse, an upright Christian! It is a notable saying of Lactantius, *Si nemo est, quin emori malit, quam converti in aliquam bestiæ figuram, quamvis hominis mentem sit habiturus; quanto miserius est in hominis figura animo esse efferato?* If, saith he, a man would choose death rather than to have the face and shape of a beast, though he might withal keep the soul of a man, how much more miserable is it under the shape of a man to carry the heart of a beast! Yet such a one is the hypocrite, yea, worse; he not only, under the shape of man, but in the disguise of a saint, carries a beastly, filthy heart within him.

Use 4. Fourthly, Let this encourage thee who art sincere against the fears of final apostacy. Though sincerity doth not privilege thee from falling, yet thy covenant state which thou art in, if sincere, secures thee from final apostasy. Because thy stock of grace in hand is small, thou questionest thy persevering. Can these weak legs, thinkest thou, bring me to my journey's end; the few pence in my purse, little grace in my heart, bear my charges all the way to heaven, through so many expenses of trials and temptations? Truly no, if thou wert to receive no more than thou hast at present. The bread thou hast in the cupboard will not maintain thee all thy life; but, soul, thou hast a covenant will help thee to more when that grows low. Hath not God taught thee to pray for thy daily bread, and dost thou not find that the blessing of God in thy calling, diligently followed, supplies thee from day to day? And hast thou not the same bond to sue for thy spiritual daily bread? Hast thou not a Father in heaven, that knows what thou needest for thy soul as well as body? Hast thou not a dear Brother, yea, Husband, that is gone to heaven, where plenty of all grace is to be had, and that on purpose on his children's errand, that he might keep their souls' graces and comforts alive in this necessitous world? All power is in his hands: he may go to the heap, and send what he pleases for your succour; and can you starve while he hath fulness of grace by him, that hath undertaken to provide for you? Luke x. 35. The two pence which the Samaritan left were not enough to pay for cure and board of the wounded man; therefore he passed his word 'for all that he should need besides.' Christ doth not only give a little grace in hand, but his bond for more to the sincere soul, even as much as will bring it to heaven, Psa. lxxxiv. 11: 'Grace and glory he will give, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.'

Use 5. Fifthly, Take heed of resting on, or glorying in thy sincerity. It is true it will enable thee to resist temptations, and to escape when in tempta-

Digitized by Google

tion; but who enables thee? Where grows the root that feeds thy grace? Not in thy own ground, but in heaven. It is God alone that holds thee and it in life. He that gave it is at cost to keep it. 'The Lord is thy strength, let him be thy song.' What can the axe, though sharp, do without the workman? Shall the axe say, I have cut down, or the chisel, I have carved? Is it not the skill and art of the workman rather? When able to resist temptation, say, 'The Lord was on my side, or else I had fallen:' set up an Ebenezer, and write on it, 'Hitherto the Lord hath helped me.'

Though God promiseth in the psalm even now cited to give grace and glory to the upright, yet he will not give the glory of his grace to uprightness. 2 Sam. xxii. 24, we have David asserting his uprightness, and how he was preserved by it: 'I was also upright before him, and have kept me from mine iniquity:' ver. 25, he declares the fruit of his uprightness, how God bare testimony to it by rewarding him for it, in vindicating him before, and giving him victory over, his enemies; 'Therefore the Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his eye-sight.' Now, lest he should set up himself, or applaud his own uprightness to the prejudice of God's grace, he sweetly corrects and bounds these passages, ver. 33: 'God is my strength and power, and he maketh my way perfect.' As if the holy man had said, I pray mistake me not, I do not ascribe the victory over my enemies within me or without to myself and my uprightness; no, God did all; he is my strength and power, yea, it is he that makes my way perfect. If I be sincere more than others in my way I must thank him for it, for he makes my way perfect. He found me at first as crooked a piece, and walking in as crooked ways, as any other, but he made me and my way perfect and straight. Had God pleased, he could have made Saul as perfect as David: had God left David, he would have been as crooked and false-hearted as Saul.

The last branch of the point was, sincerity hath a comforting strength in all sorts of affliction. The applicatory improvement of which shall be only this:

Use. Let it teach us not to fear affliction, but hypocrisy. Believe it, friends, affliction is a harmless thing to a sincere soul: it cannot be so great as to make it inconsistent with his joy and comfort. A gracious soul in the most sharp affliction can spare his tears and pity to bestow them on the hypocrite, when in all his pomp and glory: he hath that in his bosom that gives him more comfortable apprehensions of his own affliction than standers-by have, or can have of them, which made once a holy man, when the pangs of death were on him, to ask a servant of his, weeping by his bed-side for him, what she meant by her fears, saying, 'Never fear that my heavenly Father will do me any hurt.' Indeed affliction is not joyous to the flesh, which hath made some of God's dear children awhile to shrink; but after they have been acquainted with the work, and the comforts which God bestows on his poor prisoners through the grate, they have learned another tune; like the bird, that at first putting into the cage flutters, and shews her dislike of her restraint, but afterwards comes to sing more sweetly than when at liberty to fly where she pleased. Be not, therefore, so thoughtful about affliction, but careful against hypocrisy. If the bed of affliction proves hard and uneasy to thee, it is thyself that brings with thee what makes it so. Approve thyself to God, and trust him who hath promised to be his saints' bed-maker in affliction, to make it soft and easy for thee. O what a cutting word will it be in a dying hour, when thou art crying, 'Lord, Lord, have mercy on a poor creature!' to hear the Lord say, 'I know thee not:' it is not the voice of a sincere soul, but a hypocrite that howls on his bed of sorrow. What then wilt thou do, when fallen into the hands of God, with whom thou hast but juggled in thy profession, and never sincerely didst love? If that speech was so confounding to the patriarchs, 'I am Joseph, whom you sold,' that they could not endure his presence, knowing their own guilt, how intolerable will it be to hear from God's own mouth such language in a time of distress,—I am God, whom you have mocked, abused, and sold away for the enjoyment of your lusts, and do you now come to me? Have I anything for you, but a hell to torment you in, to all eternity?

Digitized by Google

VERSE 14. *And having on the breastplate of righteousness.*

THESE words present us with a second piece of armour commended to and charged upon all Christ's soldiers—a breastplate; and the metal it is to be made of—righteousness; concerning which a double inquiry would be made. First, What righteousness is here intended? Secondly, Why compared to this piece of the soldier's armour, the breastplate?

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINS THE EXPLICATION OF THE WORDS.

FIRST, What is the righteousness here meant? The Scripture speaks of a two-fold righteousness: the one legal, the other evangelical.

First, A legal righteousness; that which God required of man in the covenant of works: Rom. x. 5, 'Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doth those things shall live.' Three things concur to make up this law righteousness.

First, An obedience, absolutely perfect, to the law of God: that is, perfect, in regard of the object; intensive, in regard of the subject; the whole law must be kept with the whole heart; the least defect, either of part or degree, in the obedience, spoils all.

Secondly, This perfect obedience to the law of God must be personally performed by him that is thus righteous: 'The man that doth these things shall live.' In that covenant God had but man's single bond for performance, (no surety engaged with him), so that God having none else to come upon for the default, it was necessary, except God will lose his debt, to exact it personally on every man.

Thirdly, This perfect personal obedience must be perpetual. This law allows no after-game; if the law be once broken, though but in one wrong thought, there is no place for repentance in that covenant, though it were attended with a life afterward never so exact and spotless. After obedience (which was but due) cannot make amends for former disobedience; he doth not satisfy the law for killing a man once, that doth so no more. How desperate were our condition if we could not be enlisted in Christ's muster-roll till we were provided with such a breastplate as this is? Adam indeed had such a righteousness made to his hand; his heart and the law were unisons; it answered it as face answers face in a glass; it was as natural to him to be righteous as now it is to his posterity to be unrighteous. God was the engraver of his own image upon man, which consisted in righteousness and holiness; and he who made all so perfect, that upon a review of the whole creation, he neither added nor altered anything, but 'saw all very good,' was not less curious in the masterpiece of all his work, 'he made man perfect.' But Adam sinned, and defiled our nature; and now nature defiles us, so that never since could Adam's plate, righteousness I mean, fit the breast of any mere man; if God would save all the world for one such righteous man, as once he offered to do Sodom for ten, he could not be found. The apostle divides all the world into Jew and Gentile, Rom. iii. 9; he is not afraid to lay them all in the dirt; they are all under sin: 'There is none righteous, no, not one.' Not the proudest philosopher among the Gentiles, nor the most precise Pharisee among the Jews; we may go yet further, not the holiest saint that ever lived, can stand righteous before that bar. 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant,' saith David, 'for in thy sight shall no man living be justified,' Psa. cxliii. 2. God hath nailed that door up, that none can for ever enter by a law-righteousness into life and happiness. This way to heaven is like the northern passage to the Indies, whoever attempts it is sure to be frozen up before he gets half way thither.

Secondly, The second righteousness which the Scripture speaks of, is an evangelical righteousness. Now this also is twofold—'A righteousness imputed,' and 'imparted.' The 'imputed righteousness' is that which is wrought by Christ for the believer; the 'imparted,' that which is wrought by Christ in the believer. The first of these, the 'imputed righteousness,' is the righteousness of our justification, that by which the believer stands just and righteous

Digitized by Google

before God, and is called by way of distinction from the latter, 'the righteousness of God,' Rom. iii. 21, and x. 3. Not as if the other righteousness were not of God also; but,

First, Because this is not only wrought by Christ, but also performed in Christ, who is God; and not inherent in us, though for us; so that the benefit of it redounds by faith to us, as if we had wrought it: hence Christ is called, 'The Lord our righteousness.'

Secondly, Because this is the righteousness, and not the other, which God hath ordained to be the meritorious cause of the justification of our persons, and also acceptation of our inherent righteousness imparted by him to us. Now this righteousness belongs to the fourth piece of armour, the 'shield of faith;' indeed we find it bearing its name from that grace, Rom. iv. 11, where it is called 'the righteousness of faith,' because apprehended and applied by faith unto the soul; the righteousness, therefore, which is here compared to the breastplate, is the latter of the two, and that is the righteousness of our sanctification, which I called a righteousness imparted, or a righteousness wrought by Christ in the believer. Now this take thus described:—

It is a supernatural principle of a new life, planted in the heart of every child of God by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby they endeavour to approve themselves to God and man in performing what the word of God requires to be performed to both. Briefly let us unfold what is rolled up in this description.

First, Here is the efficient, or workman, 'the Holy Spirit:' hence it is the several parts of holiness are called 'fruits of the Spirit,' Gal. v. 22. If the Spirit be not at the root, no such fruit can be seen on the branches as holiness; 'sensual,' and 'not having the Spirit,' are inseparably coupled, Jude 19. Man by his fall hath a double loss—God's love to him, his likeness to God. Christ restores both to his children: the first by his righteousness imputed to them; the second by his Spirit reimparting the lost image of God to them, which consists in righteousness and true holiness. Who but a man can impart his own nature, and beget a child like himself? and who but the Spirit of God can make a creature, like God, by making him partaker of the Divine nature?

Secondly, Here is the work produced, 'a supernatural principle of a new life.'

1. By a principle of life, I mean, an inward disposition and quality, sweetly, powerfully, and constantly inclining it to that which is holy: so that the Christian, though passive in the production, is afterwards active, and co-working with the Spirit in all actions of holiness; not as a lifeless instrument is in the hand of a musician, but as a living child in the hand of a father: therefore they are said to be 'led by the Spirit,' Rom. viii.

2. It is a principle of new life. The Spirit's work was not to chafe and recover what was swooning, but to work a life *de novo* in a soul quite dead: 'You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses.' The devil comes as an orator to persuade by argument, when he tempts: the Spirit as a creator, when he converts. The devil draws forth and enkindles what he finds raked up in the heart before; but the Holy Spirit puts into the soul what he finds not there, called in the Scripture, 'the seed of God,' 1 John iii. 9: 'Christ formed in you,' Gal. iv. 19; 'the new creature,' Gal. vi. 15; 'the law put by God into the inner man,' Jer. xxxi. 33; which Paul calls, 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,' Rom. viii. 2.

3. It is a supernatural principle, by which we distinguish it from Adam's righteousness and holiness, which was co-natural to him as now sin is to us; and had he stood, would have been propagated to us as naturally as now his sin is. Holiness was as natural to Adam's soul, as health was to his body, they both resulting *ex principiis recte constitutis*, from principles pure and rightly disposed.

Thirdly, Here is the soil or subject in which the Spirit plants this principle of holiness, 'the child of God.' 'Because ye are sons, he hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts,' Gal. iv. 6: not a child in all his family that is unlike his Father; 'as is the heavenly, so are they that are heavenly;' and none but children have his stamp of true holiness on them. As the apostle, Rom. viii. 9, concludes, 'we have not the Spirit' if 'we be in the flesh,' (that is, in an unholy, sinful state,) so he concludes 'we are not his' (children) if we 'have

Digitized by Google

not his Spirit' thus transforming and sanctifying us. There is indeed a holiness and sanctification taken in a large sense, which may be found in such as are not children; so all the children of believers are holy, 1 Cor. vii., who are not all children of God; yea, false professors also gain the name of being sanctified, Heb. x. 29, because they pretend to be so; but that which the Scripture calls righteousness and true holiness, is a sculpture the Spirit engraves on none but the children of God. The Spirit sanctifies none but whom Christ prays his Father to sanctify, and they are his peculiar number given of God to him, John xvii.

Fourthly, Here is the efficacy of this principle, planted by the Spirit in the heart of a child of God, 'whereby he endeavours.' As the heart, which is the principle of natural life in the body, from the infusion of natural life, is ever beating and working; so is the principle of new life in the soul ever endeavouring. The new creature is not still-born; true holiness is not a dull habit, that sleeps away the time with doing nothing. The woman cured by Christ 'rose up presently and ministered unto them,' Matt. viii. No sooner this principle is planted in the heart, but the man riseth up to wait on God, and act for God, with all his might and main; the seed which the sanctifying Spirit casts into the soul is not lost in the soil, but quickly shews it is alive by the fruit it bears.

Fifthly, Here is the imperfect nature of this principle; as it shews its reality by endeavouring, so its imperfection, that it enables but to an endeavour, not a full performance. Evangelical holiness rather makes the creature willing than able to give full obedience. The saint's heart leaps, when his legs do but creep in the way of God's commandments. Mary asked, 'where they had laid Christ,' meaning, it seems, to carry him away on her shoulders, which she was not able for to do; her affections were stronger than her back. That principle of holiness which is in the saint, makes him lift at that duty which he can little more than stir. Paul, a saint of the first magnitude, gives us his own character, with other eminent servants of Christ, rather from the sincerity of their will and endeavour, than perfection of their work, Heb. xiii. 8: 'Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly; he doth not say, in all things we do live honestly, as if no steps were taken awry by them: no, he durst not say so for a world; but thus much he dares assert for himself and brethren, that they were willing in all things to do what was holy and righteous. Where willing is not a weak, listless velleity, but a will exerted in a vigorous endeavour, it weighs as much in an impartial ear, as that of the same Paul, Acts xxiv. 16: 'Herein do I exercise myself;' he was so willing, as to use his best care and labour in the ways of holiness; and having this testimony in his own breast, he is not afraid to lay claim to a good conscience, though he doth not fully attain to that he desires: 'We trust we have a good conscience, willing, &c. He means in the favourable interpretation of the gospel, for the law allows no such good conscience.

Sixthly, Here is the uniformity of this principle in its actings: 'To God and man.' True holiness doth not divide what God joins together: 'God spake all these words,' Exod. xx.: first table and second also. Now, a truly sanctified heart dares not skip or blot one word God hath written, but desires to be a faithful executor to perform the whole will of God.

Seventhly, Here is the order of its acting: as 'to God and man.' So, first 'to God,' and then 'to man;' yea to God in his righteousness, and charity to men, 2 Cor. viii. 5: 'First gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.' God is first served, and man in obedience to the will of God.

Eighthly, Here is the rule it goes by: 'What the word of God requires.' Apocriphal holiness is no true holiness; we cannot write in religion a right line without a rule, or by a false one. And all are false rules besides the word: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' Isa. viii. 20.

Secondly, The second thing to be inquired is, Why righteousness and holiness are compared to the breastplate. And that is for a twofold use that the soldier makes of, and benefit he receives from this piece of armour.

First, The breastplate preserves the most principal part of the body, and that is the breast where the very vitals of man are closely couched together;

Digitized by Google

and where a shot and stab is more deadly than in other parts that are remote from the fountain of life. A man may outlive many wounds received in the arms or legs, but a stab in the heart or other vital parts is the certain messenger of death approaching. Thus righteousness and holiness preserve the principal part of a Christian, his soul and conscience; we live or die spiritually, yea, eternally, as we look to our souls and consciences. It is not a wound in estate, credit, or any other worldly enjoyment, that kills us in this sense. These touch not, hazard not the Christian's life, any more than the shaving of the beard, or paring of the nails do the man's: spiritual vitals are seated in the soul and conscience; it must be a spiritual dagger that stabs these, and that only is sin, which is said 'to hunt for the precious life,' Prov. vi. 26. This is the dart that strikes the young man 'through the liver,' who hasteth to his lusts 'as the bird to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life,' Prov. vii. Now, righteousness and holiness defend the conscience from all wounds and harms, from sin, which is the weapon Satan useth to give the conscience its deadly stab with.

Secondly, The breastplate, by defending this principal part, emboldens the soldier, and makes him fearless of danger, and that is as necessary in fight as the other; it is almost all one for an army to be killed or cowed. A dead soldier, slain upon the place, will do in a manner as much good as a dead-hearted soldier that is dismayed with fear; his heart is killed while he is alive; and a naked breast exposeth the unarmed soldier to a trembling heart, whereas one, otherwise cowardly, having his breast defended with a plate of proof, will more boldly venture upon the pikes. Thus righteousness, by defending the conscience, fills the creature with courage in the face of death and danger; whereas guilt, which is the nakedness of the soul, puts the stoutest sinner into a shaking fit of fear. 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion,' Prov. xxviii. 1. They say sheep are scared with the clatter of their own feet as they run; so is the sinner with the din of his guilt. No sooner Adam saw his plate off, and himself to be naked, but he is afraid at God's voice, as if he had never been acquainted with him. Never can we recover truly our courage, till we recover our holiness: 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we boldness with God,' 1 John iii. 21.

CHAPTER II.

A SHORT POINT FROM THE CONNEXION OF THIS PIECE OF ARMOUR WITH THE FIRST; RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH TRUTH.

The words thus opened, the observations are now easy to be drawn from them; but the copulative 'and,' with which this piece of armour is so closely buckled to the former, bids us make a little stand to take notice how lovingly truth and holiness are here conjoined; like the sister-curtains of the tabernacle, so called in the Hebrew, Exod. xxvi. 3; and it is pity any should unclasp them, which God hath so fitted each to other. Let that, then, be the note from hence.

Note.—That truth and holiness must go together.

First, Take truth for truth of doctrine. An orthodox judgment with an unholy heart and ungodly life is as uncomely as a man's head would be on a beast's shoulders. That man hath little cause to boast that what he holds is truth, if what he doth be wicked. Poor wretch, if thou art a slave to the devil, it matters not to what part thy chain is fastened, whether head or foot; he holds thee as sure to him by thy foot, in thy practice, as he would by thy head, if heretical and blasphemous; yea, thou art worse on it, in some respects, than they who are like themselves all over. Thy wickedness is greater, because committed in the face of truth. The mistakes of the erroneous judgments of man betray them unto the unholiness of their practice; their wicked lives are the conclusion which follows necessary upon the premises of their errors; but thy judgment lights thee another way (except thou meanest further to accumulate thy sin by fathering thy unholiness on truth itself). They only miss their way to heaven in the dark, or are misled by a false light of an erroneous judgment, which possibly rectified, would bring them back into the path of holiness; but thou sinnest by the broad light of truth, and goest on boldly to hell at noon-day; like the devil himself, who knows truth from error well enough, but hates

Digitized by Google

to be ruled by it. Should a minstrel sing to a sweet tune with her voice, and play to another with her hand that is harsh and displeasing, such music would more grate the judicious ear than if she had sung to what she played. Thus to sing to truth with our judgment, and play wickedness with our heart and hand in our life, is more abhoring to God, and all good men, than where the judgment is erroneous as well as the life ungodly. Nahsah had not enraged David so much if he had come with an army of twenty thousand men into the field against him, as he did by abusing his ambassadors so basely. The open hostility which many express by their ungodly lives, does not so much provoke God as the base usage they give to his truth, which he sends to treat with them, yea, in them. This kindles the fire of his wrath into a flame to purpose, when he sees men put scorn upon his truth, by walking contrary to the light of it, and imprisoning it from having any command over them in heir lives, and yet own it to be the truth of God.

Secondly, Take it for truth of heart; and so truth and holiness must go together. In vain do men pretend to sincerity; if they be unholy in their lives. God owns no unholy sincerity: the terms do clash one with another. Sincerity teacheth the soul to point at the right end of all its actions—the glory of God. Now it is not enough to set the right end before us, but to walk in the right way to it; we shall never come at God's glory out of God's way; holiness and righteousness is the sincere man's path set by God, as a causeway on which he is to walk, both to the glorifying of God, and the being glorified by God. Now, he that thinks to find a shorter cut and a nearer way to obtain this end, than this way he takes but pains to undo himself. As he finds a new way of glorifying God, which God had not chalked, so he must find a new heaven, which God hath not prepared, or else he must go without one to reward him for his pains. O friends! look to find this stamp of righteousness and holiness on your sincerity. The proverb saith, 'Hell is full of good wishes,' of such who now (when it is too late) wish they had acted their part otherwise when on earth than they did. And do you not think there are there more than a good store of good meanings also? Such who pretended, when on earth, they meant well, and their hearts were honest; however it happened that their lives were otherwise: what a strange delusion is this! If one should say, though all the water the bucket brings up be naught and putrid, yet that which is in the well is all sweet, who would believe him? Thy heart upright, and thy meanings good, when all that proceeds from thy heart in thy life is wicked, how can it be? Who will believe thee? surely thou dost not thyself.

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN THE GRAND POINT FROM THE WORDS IS LAID DOWN, THAT THE CHRISTIAN'S ESPECIAL CARE SHOULD BE TO KEEP ON HIS BREASTPLATE, I. E., MAINTAIN THE POWER OF HOLINESS IN HIS CONVERSATION; WITH THE FIRST REASON OF THE POINT TAKEN FROM GOD, HIS DESIGN AS TO THIS.

It is now time, having measured the ground, to lay the bottom stone, on which the structure from these words is to be reared. I thought to have drawn out several points as distinct foundations to build our discourse upon, but shall now rather choose to unite all in a single point, as one main building, though I make a few more rooms therein, to entertain what else should have been handled severally. The point is this:

Doct. That he who means to be a Christian indeed, must endeavour to maintain the power of holiness and righteousness in his life and conversation. This is to have the breastplate of righteousness, and to have it on also; he is a holy, righteous man that hath a work of grace and holiness in his heart, as he a living man that hath a principle of life in him; but he maintains the power of holiness that exerts this vigorously in his daily walking, as he the power of natural life, in whom the principle of life, seated in the heart, empowers every member to do its particular office in the body strenuously. Thus walked the primitive Christians, 'in whose veins,' said Jerome, 'the blood of Christ was yet warm;' their great care was to keep on this breastplate of righteousness close and entire, that it neither might loosen by negligence, nor be broken by presumptuous sinning; the character then a saint was known by from other

Digitized by Google

men, was his holy walking, Luke i. 16: there it is said of Zacharias and Elizabeth, 'They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.' This was also holy Paul's every day's exercise, 'to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and man,' Acts xxiv. Never did any more curiously watch the health of their body than he attended to the health of his soul, that no unholiness or unrighteousness, which is the only bane of it, might distemper and defile it. And truly, we, who come after such holy ones in the same profession, do bind ourselves to our good behavour, that we will walk holily and righteously as they did. The point carries its evidence on it forehead, and needs rather pressing than proving: and therefore I may be pardoned, if the demonstrations of the point be handled, as well motives to, as reasons for the duty, which will spare work in the application. Reasons of the point shall be taken from several heads.

First, In regard of God, whose great design is to have his people a holy people. This is enough to oblige, yea, to provoke every Christian to promote what God hath so strongly set upon his heart to effect. He deserves to be cashiered that endeavours not to pursue what his general declares to be his design. And he to have his name blotted out of Christ's muster-roll, whose heart stands not on tip-toe ready to march, yea, to run on his designs. It is an honourable epitaph which Paul sets on the memory of David long befor deceased, Acts xiii. 36, that he 'in his own generation served the will of God;' he made it the business of his life to carry on God's designs. And all gracious hearts, touched with the same loadstone of God's love, stand to the same point. All the private ends of a sincere soul are swallowed up in this, that he may do 'the will of God in his generation.' This he heartily prays for, 'Thy will be done;' this is his study, to find what is the 'good and acceptable will of God,' which is the very cause why he loves the Bible above all other books of the world beside, because in none but that can he find what is the mind and will of God concerning him. Now I shall endeavour to shew, that this is the great design of God, to have his people holy. It runs like a silver thread through all God's other designs.

Section I.—First, It appears in his very decrees, which, so far as they are printed and exposed to our view in the Scripture, we may safely look into. What was God driving at in his electing some out of the lump of mankind? Was it only their impunity he desired, that, while others were left to swim in torment and misery, they should only be exempted from that infelicity? No sure; the apostle will tell us more, Eph. i. 4: 'He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.' Mark, not because he foresaw that they would be of themselves holy, but that they should be holy; this was that God resolved he would make them to be. As if some curious workman, seeing a forest, growing upon his own ground, of trees, all alike, not one better than another, should mark some above all the rest, and set them apart in his thoughts, as resolving to make some rare pieces of workmanship of them. Thus God chose some out of the lump of mankind, whom he set apart for this purpose, to carve his own image upon them, which consists in righteousness and true holiness; a piece of such rare workmanship, which, when God hath finished, and shall shew it to men and angels, will appear to exceed the fabric of heaven and earth itself.

Section II.—Secondly, It was his design in sending his Son into the world. It could be no small occasion that brought him hither. God wants not servants to go on his ordinary errands. The glorious angels, who behold his face continually, are ready to fly wherever he sends them. But here God had a work to do of such importance, that he would put trust not in his servants, but his Son alone to accomplish. Now what God's design was in this great work will appear by knowing what Christ was, for they were, both Father and Son, agreed, what should be done before he came upon the stage of action. See therefore the very bottom of Christ's heart in this his great undertaking opened, Titus ii. 14: 'He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Had man kept his primitive righteousness, Christ's pain and pains had been spared. It was man's lost holiness he came to recover. It had not been an enterprise

Digitized by Google

becoming the greatness and holiness of such a one as the Son of God to engage for, less than this. Both God and man, between whom Christ comes to negotiate, call for holiness: God's glory, man's happiness, neither of which can be attained, except holiness be restored to man. Not God's glory, who, as he is glorious in the holiness of his own nature and works, so is he glorified by the holiness of his people's hearts and lives; were it possible, which is the height of all blasphemy but to think, that the holiness of God could be separated from any of his attributes or works, God himself would cease to be glorious; his sovereignty would degenerate into tyranny, his wisdom into craft, his justice into cruelty, &c. Now, the glory of all God's attributes and works resulting from his holiness in them all, it follows that then we glorify God, when we give him the glory of his holiness; and who but a holy creature will or can do that? While man stands under the power of sin, how can he give God the glory of that, which his own sinful nature makes him defy and hate God for? Had Christ's design therefore been to procure man a pardon, and not restore his lost holiness, he had been but a minister of sins; and instead of bringing glory to God, he had set sin in the throne, and only obtained a liberty for the creature to dishonour God without control. Again, man's happiness could not have been obtained without a recovery of his lost holiness. Man's happiness stands in his likeness to God, and fruition of God; he must have the first before he can enjoy the latter; he must be like God before God can take any pleasure in him; and God must take full content in man before he admits him to the enjoyment of himself; which, that he may do, Christ undertakes to make his people holy, as God is holy. You see now what was the great design that the heart of Christ was so full with, to make us a holy people. Well, therefore, may the apostle bring in that heavy charge against all unholy professors, which he doth with tears, Phil. iii. 18: 'That they are enemies of the cross of Christ.' Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; the loose, unholy walker, he goes about to destroy the work of Christ. The Lord Jesus lays down his heart-blood to redeem souls out of the hand of sin and Satan, that he may be free to serve God without fear in holiness; and the loose Christian, if I may call him so, 'denies the Lord that bought him,' and delivers up himself basely unto his old bondage, from which Christ had ransomed him with so great a sum: whose heart doth not tremble at such horrid ingratitude?

SECTION III.—Thirdly, It is God's great design in the regenerating work of the Spirit on the hearts of his people, to make them righteous, and fit them to walk holily before him, Ezekiel xxxvi. 26, 27, where God promiseth 'a new heart, and to put his Spirit into them;' and why will he do this? That he may cause them to 'walk in his statutes, keep his judgments, and do them.' An old heart would have served well enough to do the devil's drudgery. But God, intending them for more high and noble employment, to lift up their head out of sin's prison, and prefer them to his own service, therefore he throws away their gaol clothes, and beautifies them with the graces of his Spirit, that their hearts may suit their work. When God ordered the temple to be built with such curious care and costly materials, he declared that he intended it for holy use; that was not so glorious as the spiritual temple of a regenerate heart is, which is 'the workmanship of God himself;' Eph. ii. 10: and for what intent reared by him, if we read on, we may see: 'created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath foreordained that we should walk in them.' This accents the unrighteousness and unholiness of a saint with a circumflex, it lays a deeper aggravation, I mean upon his sin, than others, because committed against such a work of the Spirit as none have in the world besides. A sin acted in the temple was greater than if the same had been, by a Jew, committed in his private dwelling, because the temple was a consecrated place. The saint is a consecrated person, and by acts of unrighteousness he profanes God's temple: the sin of another is theft, because he robs God of the glory due to him; but the sin of a saint is sacrilege, because he robs God of that which is devoted to him in an especial manner. Better not to repent at all, than to repent of our repentance; not to vow and dedicate ourselves to him, and after this to inquire, how we may evade and repeal this act; such a one tells the world he finds 'some iniquity in God,' that alters his opinion and practice formerly taken up by him. In a word, the saint is not only by the Spirit consecrated to God, but

Digitized by Google

by the Spirit endued with a new life from God: 'You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins,' Eph. ii. 2. A noble principle of high extraction, given you on a high design, that you should live up to that principle in righteousness and holiness. When God breathed a rational soul into man, he intended not that he should live with the beasts, and as the beasts; nor that thou shouldst have thy conversation as a mere carnal man doth; but that 'as thou hast received Christ, so thou shouldst walk in him,' Col. ii. 6. The apostle blames the Corinthians for living below themselves, and like the poor-spirited men of the world in their corrupt passions: 'Are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' 1 Cor. iii. 3. When thou, Christian, actest unholily, thou sinnest at a high rate indeed: others sin against the light of God in their consciences, there is the furthest they can go; but thou sinnest against the life of God in thy very heart. The more unnatural any act is, the more horrid. It is unnatural for a man to be cruel to his own flesh; for a woman to go about to kill the child in her womb; O how your ears tingle at such a flagitious act! What then art thou going to do, when by thy unholy walking thou art killing the babe of grace in thy soul? Is not Herod marked for a bloody man that would have butchered Christ newly born in the world? And canst thou, without horror, attempt the murdering of Christ newly formed in thy heart?

Section IV.—Fourthly, It is the great design God drives at in his word and ordinances, to make his people holy and righteous. The word of God is both seed to beget, and food to nourish, holiness begotten in the heart; every part of it contributes to this design abundantly. The preceptive part affords a perfect rule of holiness for the saint to walk by, not accommodated to the humours of any, as men's laws are, who make their laws as tailors their garments, to fit the crooked bodies they are for, so they, the crooked minds of men. The commands of God gratify the lusts of none; they are suited to the holy nature of God, not the unholy hearts of men. The promises present us with admirable encouragements to allure us on in the way of holiness; all of them so warily laid, that an unholy heart cannot, without violence to his conscience, lay claim to any one of them, God having set that flaming sword, conscience, in the sinner's bosom, to keep him him off from touching or tasting the fruit of this tree of life; and if any profane heart be so bold, while he is walking in the ways of unrighteousness, to finger any of the treasure that is locked up in the promises, it doth not long stay in their hands, but God sooner or later makes them throw it away, as Judas his thirty pieces, their consciences telling them they are not the right owners. False comforts from the promises, like riches, which Solomon speaks of, 'make themselves wings, and fly away' from the unholy wretch, when he thinks he is most sure of them. Again: the threatenings, the minatory part of the word, this runs like a devouring gulf on either side of the narrow path of holiness and righteousness, ready to swallow up every soul that walks not therein, Rom. i. 18: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.' To the promissory, and minatory, is annexed the exemplary part of the word, as cases to confirm our faith concerning the truth and certainty of both. The promises are backed with the examples of holy men and women, who have beaten the path of holiness for us; and through faith and patience in their holy course, have at last obtained the comfort of the promises in heaven's bliss, to the unspeakable encouragement of all that are ascending the hill after them. To the threatenings are annexed many sad examples of unholy souls, who have undone themselves, and damned their own souls in unholy ways; whose carcases are, as it were, thrown upon the shore of the word, and exposed to our view in reading and hearing of it, that we may be kept from being engulfed in those sins that were their perdition, 1 Cor. x. 6: 'These were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.' Thus we see how the whole composure of the Scripture befriends holiness, and speaks what the design of God therein is, which, yet to carry on the more strongly, God hath appointed many holy ordinances to quicken the word upon our hearts. Indeed, all of them are but the word in several forms. Hearing, prayer, sacraments, meditation, holy conference,—the word is the subject-matter of them all; only as a wise physician doth prepare the same drug several ways, sometimes to be taken one way, sometimes another, to make it

Digitized by Google

more effectual, and refresh his patient with variety, so the Lord, consulting our weakness, doth by his word administering it to us now in this, anon in that ordinance for our greater delight and profit; aiming still at the same end in all, even the promoting of holiness in the hearts and lives of his people; what are they all but as veins and arteries, by which Christ conveys the life-blood and spirits of holiness into every member of his mystical body? The church is the garden, Christ the fountain, every ordinance as a pipe from him, to water all the beds in this garden; and why, but to make them more abundant in the fruits of righteousness?

SECTION V.—Fifthly, It is his design in all his providences. 'All things,' that is, all providences especially, 'work together for good, to them that love God,' Rom. viii. 28; and how do they work for their good, but by making them better and more holy? Providences are good and evil to us as they find or make us better or worse; nothing is good to him that is evil. As God makes use of all the seasons of the year for the harvest, the frost and cold of winter, as well as the heat of the summer; so doth he of fair and foul, pleasing and unpleasing providences, for promoting holiness: winter providences kill the weeds of lusts, and summer providences ripen and mellow the fruits of righteousness; when he afflicts it is for our profit, to make us partakers of his holiness, Heb. xii. 10. Afflictions, Bernard compares to the teazel, which, though it be sharp and scratching, is to make the cloth more pure and fine. God would not rub so hard if it were not to fetch out the dirt that is ingrained in our natures. God loves purity so well, he had rather see a hole than a spot in his child's garments. When he deals more gently in his providences, and lets his people sit under the sunny bank of comforts and enjoyments, fencing them from the cold blasts of affliction, it is to draw forth the sap of grace, and hasten their growth in holiness. Paul understood this, when he besought the saints at Rome, 'by the mercies of God to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God,' Rom. xii. 1. Implying, that mercies came from God to us on this very errand; God might reasonably expect such a return. The husbandman, when he lays his compost on his ground, looks to receive it at harvest again in the fuller crop; and so doth God by his mercies; therefore he doth so vehemently complain of Israel's ingratitude, Hosea ii. 8: 'She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver, which they prepared for Baal.' God took it ill, and well might he, that they should entertain Baal at his cost; if God sends in any cheer to us, he would have us know that it is for his own entertainment; he means to come and sup upon his own charge. And what dish is it that pleaseth God's palate? Surely, he that would not have his people eat of any unclean thing, will not himself. They are the pleasant fruits of holiness and righteousness, which Christ comes into his garden to feed on, Cant. v. 1: 'I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh and my spice, I have eaten my honey with my honeycomb, I have drunk my wine with my milk.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECOND REASON WHY THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD WEAR THIS BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND MAINTAIN THE POWER OF HOLINESS SO CAREFULLY, TAKEN FROM SATAN'S GREAT DESIGN AGAINST IT.

SECONDLY, In regard of Satan, whose design is as much against the saint's holiness, as God is for it. He hath ever a nay to God's yea; if God be for holiness, he must needs be against it: and what should be our chief care to defend, but that which Satan's thoughts and plots are most laid to assault and storm? There is no creature the devil delights so to lodge and dwell in, as man. When he enters into other creatures, it is but on design against man; as when he entered the serpent, it was to deceive Eve: the swine, Matt. viii. 32, he possessed them on a design to dispossess the Gergesenes of the gospel; but might he choose his own lodging, none pleaseth him but man: and why? Because man only is capable, by his rational soul, of sin and unrighteousness. And as he prefers man to quarter in above all inferior creatures, so he had rather possess the souls of men than their bodies; none but the best room in the house will serve this unclean spirit to vomit his blasphemies, and eject his malice in against God; and why? but because the soul is the proper seat of holiness and sin.

Digitized by Google

This, one gives as the reason why amongst all the ways that Satan plagued Job, he did not choose to make a forcible entry into his body, and possess him corporally; for certainly he might, that being short of taking away his life, (the only thing reserved by God out of his commission,) and being in his power, sure it was not to spare Job that trouble. No pity dwells in a devil's heart; but the very reason seems to be what an ancient hath noted; the devil waited for higher preferment, he hoped to possess his soul, which he longed for a thousand times more. He had rather hear Job himself blaspheme God, while he was *compos mentis*, his own man, than himself, in Job, to belch out blasphemies against God, which would have been the devil's own sin, and not Job's. Thus you see, it is holiness and righteousness his spite is at; no gain comes to the devil's purse, no victory he counts gained, except he can make the Christian lose his holiness. He can allow a man to have anything, or be anything, rather than be truly powerfully holy. It is not your riches and worldly enjoyments he grudges so much as your holiness. Job, for aught we know, might have enjoyed his flocks and herds, his children and servants, without any disturbance from hell, if the devil had not seen him to be a godly man, 'one fearing God, and eschewing evil.' This angered the wicked spirit; now he tries a fall with Job, that, if possible, he may unsaint him, and despoil him of his breastplate of righteousness. His plundering of his estate, butchering his children, covering his body with sores and boils, which were as so many deep gashes in his flesh, was but like some thieves' cruel usage of men whom they would rob, on a design to make them confess and deliver up their treasure. Would but Job have thrown the devil his purse, his integrity, I mean, and let Satan carry away his good conscience, Satan would soon have unbound him, and not have cared if he had his estate and children again. The wolf tears the fleece, that he may come to raven on the flesh, and suck the blood of the sheep; the life-blood of holiness is that which this hellish murderer longs to suck out of the Christian's heart. It is not a form of godliness, or goodly shews of righteousness, the devil maligns, but the power; not the name, but the new nature itself, brings this fell lion out of his den. Satan can live very peaceably, as a quiet neighbour, by the door of such as will content themselves with an empty name of profession; this alters not his property, nor touches his copyhold. Judas's profession, he knew, did not put him a step out of his way to hell; the devil can shew a man a way to damnation through duties and ordinances of God's worship. That covetous, traitorous heart which Judas carried with him to hear Christ's sermon, and preach his own, held him fast enough to the devil; and therefore he gives him line enough, liberty enough to keep his credit a while with his fellow-apostles; he cares not though others think him a disciple of Christ, so he knows him to be his own slave.

In a word, It is not a superstitious holiness which offends him; how can it, when he is the institutor of it himself, and that on a subtle design to undermine the true genuine holiness in the hearts of men? and by this time the church of Christ hath found how deep a contrivance it is. This in all ages hath been to the power of holiness what the ivy is to the oak; the wanton embraces of this mock holiness about religion hath killed the heart of scriptural holiness wherever it hath prevailed; it is to the true holiness as the concubine is to the true wife, who is sure to draw the husband's love from her. This brat the devil hath long put out to nurse to the Romish church, which hath taken a great deal of pains to bring it up for him; and no wonder, when she is so well paid for its maintenance, it having brought her in so much worldly treasure and riches. No, it is holiness in its naked simplicity, as is founded upon Scripture bottom, and guided by Scripture rule, that he is a sworn enemy against. Indeed, this is the flag which the soul hangs out, and by which it gives defiance to the devil; no wonder if he strives to shoot it down. Now, and not till now, the creature really declares himself a friend to God, and an enemy to the kingdom of darkness: and here is the ground of that quarrel, which will never cease so long as he continues an unclean spirit, and they to be the holy ones of God. 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,' 2 Tim. iii. 12. Mark first, what it is that makes the devil and his instruments take arms, and breathe slaughter against Christians, 'it is their godliness.' Many specious pretences persecutors have to disguise their malice; but the Spirit of God, that looks

Digitized by Google

through their hypocritical mask, is privy to the cabinet councils of their hearts, and those instructions which they have from the devil, that worketh so mightily in them. He tells us, 'he that will live godly' shall be persecuted: downright godliness is the butt they level their arrows at. Again, observe the kind of godliness at which their blood rises: 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus.' There are more sorts of holiness and godliness in the world than one; but all may have fair quarter at the devil's hands except this godliness in Jesus Christ. The devil hath an implacable malice against Christ; he hates, as I may so say, every letter of his name: that godliness, which is learned of him, and derived from him, he opposeth to death. Christian blood is sweet to his tooth; but the blood of the Christian's godliness is far sweeter. He had rather, if he could, kill that than them; rather draw the Christian from his godliness, than butcher him for it; yet that he may not stand out, he will play at small game, and express his cruelty upon their bodies; but it is when he cannot come at their souls, Heb. xi. 37: 'They were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain. That which these bloody men principally desired was to draw them into sin, and make apostates of them, and therefore they tempted them before they slew them. The devil accounts that the complete victory when he can despoil them of their armour, and bribe them from their steadfastness in their holy profession: 'Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion,' Micah iv. 11. He had rather see saints defiled with unrighteousness and sin, than defiled with their blood and gore. Persecution, he hath learnt, doth but mow the church, which afterward comes up the thicker for it; it is unholiness that ruins it. Persecutors do but plough God's field for him, while he is sowing it with the blood that they let out; but profaneness, that roots it up, and lays all waste, consciences and churches also.

CHAPTER V.

THE THIRD REASON, TAKEN FROM THE EXCELLENCY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS.

THIRDLY, In regard of holiness itself, the incomparable excellency whereof commands us to pursue it, and endeavour it with our utmost care and strength.

First, It is an excellency peculiar to the rational creature. Inferior creatures have a goodness proper to them, but intellectual beings are only capable of an inward holiness. God saw every 'creature' he made to be 'good,' only 'angels' and 'man' to be 'holy;' and if we part with holiness, that is our crown, we become worse than the beasts themselves; yea, it is holiness and righteousness that makes one man differ from another in God's account. We go by a false heart, when we value men by their external advantages. All stand on a level as to God, till holiness be superadded. Princes, in whom is seated the sovereign power, claim as their prerogative to set the just value on all coin, what every piece shall go for—this a penny, and that a pound; much more surely doth it belong to God to rate his creatures; and he tells us, 'The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,' Prov. xii.; 'The tongue of the just is as choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is little worth,' Prov. x. 20. The Spirit of God compares the righteous to silver and gold, the most precious of metals, which above all other metals are of such account, that only money made of silver and gold is current in all countries. Holiness will go in both worlds; but external excellences, such as worldly riches, honours, &c., like leather and brass money, are of no esteem but in this beggarly lower world.

Secondly, It is holiness that is, though not our plea, yet our evidence for heaven: 'Without holiness none shall see God.' Heaven is a city where righteousness dwells. Though God suffers the earth to bear for a while unholy men, which it doth not without sweating under their weight, and groaning to be rid of this load, yet sure he will never admit them into heaven. Before Enoch was translated to heaven he walked holily with God on earth, which made God desire his company so soon. O friends! do we like an empty profession, such a religion as will leave us short of heaven? or can we reasonably expect a dispensation above others, that we should commence glorified creatures in heaven, without keeping our acts, and performing the exercises of godliness, which God hath laid upon those that will stand candidates for that place? Certainly what God hath written in his word as to this shall stand. He

Digitized by Google

will not make a blot in his decrees for any, which he should, did he alter the method of salvation in the least. Either we must therefore renounce our hopes of coming thither, or resolve to walk in the path of holiness that will lead us thither. That is vain breath which sets not the sails of our affections a-going, and our feet a-travelling thither, where we would be at last.

Thirdly, It is holiness, and that maintained in its power, that capacitates us for communion with God in this life. Communion with God is so desirable, that many pretend to it that know not what it means; like some that brag of their acquaintance with such a great man, who, may be, never saw his face, or were admitted into his company. The Spirit of God gives the lie to that man, who saith he hath any acquaintance with God, while he keeps his acquaintance with any unrighteousness, 1 John i. 6: 'If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie.' The apostle is willing to pass for a loud liar himself, if he walks in darkness, and pretends to have fellowship with God. How can they walk together that are not agreed? Communion is founded on union, and union upon likeness. And how like are God and the devil, holiness and unrighteousness, one to the other? There is a vast difference between conversing with ordinances and having communion with God. A man may have great acquaintance with ordinances, and be a great stranger to God at the same time. Every one that goes to court, and hangs about the palace, doth not speak with the prince; and what sorry things are ordinances without this communion with God! Ordinances are, as it were, the exchange where holy souls trade with God by his Spirit for heavenly treasures, from which they come filled and enriched with grace and comfort. Now what does the unholy wretch? Truly like some idle persons that come and walk among merchants on the exchange, but have no business there, or commerce whereby they get any advantage. An unholy heart hath no dealings with God, he takes no notice of God may be: to be sure God takes no such notice of him, as to communicate himself graciously to him. Nay, suppose a person habitually holy, but under the power of some temptation for the present, whereby he defiles himself, he is in this case unfit to have any friendly communion with God. 'A righteous man falling down before the wicked is,' saith Solomon, 'as a troubled fountain, and a corrupt spring,' Prov. xxv. 26. Much more is he so when he falls down before the wicked one, and yields to his temptation, now his spirit is ruffled and muddied; and if we will not use the water of a spring (though in itself pure and wholesome) when it is troubled, or drink of that vessel that runs thick, but stay while it be settled and comes clear, can we wonder if God refuseth to taste of those duties which a godly person performs, before the stream be cleared, for the renewing of his repentance for his sin?

Fourthly, Holiness, in the power of it, is necessary to the true peace and repose of the soul. I do not say our peace is bottomed on the righteousness of our nature, or holiness of our lives; yet it is ever attended with these. 'No peace to the wicked, saith my God.' We may as soon make the sea always still, as an unholy heart truly quiet. From whence come the intestine wars in men's bosoms, that set them at variance with themselves, but from their own lusts? These break the peace, and keep the man in a continual tempest. As the Spirit of holiness comes into the heart, and the sceptre of Christ, which is a sceptre of righteousness, bears sway in the life, so the storm abates more and more, till it be quite down, which will not be while we are short of heaven; there only is perfect rest, because perfect holiness. Whence those frights and fears which make them a *magor missabib*, terror round about? They wake and sleep with the scent of hell-fire about them continually. O it is their unholy course and unrighteous ways that walk in their thoughts, as John's ghost in Herod's. This makes men discontented in every condition; they neither can relish the sweetness of their enjoyments, nor bear the bitter taste of their afflictions. I know there are ways to stupify the conscience, and bind up for a time the senses of an unholy heart, that it shall not feel its own misery; but the virtue of this opium is soon spent, and then the wretch is upon the rack again, and his horror returns upon him with a greater paroxysm; an example whereof I have heard. A notorious drunkard, who used, when told of his ungodly life, to shake off all the threatenings of the word that his friends would have fastened on his conscience, as easily as Paul did the viper from his hand, bearing

Digitized by Google

himself upon a presumptuous hope of the mercy of God in Christ. It pleased God to lay him some while after on his bed by sickness, which for a time scared his old companions, brethren with him in iniquity, from visiting him; but hearing he was cheery and pleasant in his sickness, ventured to see him, whom they found very confident of the mercy of God, whereby their hands were much strengthened in their old ways. But before he died this tune was changed to purpose, his vain hopes vanish, his guilty conscience awakened, and the poor wretch, roasted in the scorching flames of his former ungodly practices, now ready to die, cries out despairingly, 'O sirs, I had prepared a plaster, and thought all was well, but now it will stick no longer!' His guilty conscience rubbed it off as fast as he clapped it on; and truly, friends, you will find the blood of Christ himself will not cleave to a soul that is in league with any way of sin and unrightness: God will pluck such from the horns of this altar that fly to it, but not from their unrighteousness, and slay them in the sight of this sanctuary they boldly trust to. You know the message Solomon sent to Adonijah, 'If thou shewest thyself a worthy man, not a hair of thy head shall fall; but if wickedness shall be found in thee, thou shalt surely die.' In vain do men think to shroud themselves under Christ's wing from the hue and cry of their accusing conscience, while wickedness finds a sanctuary in them. Christ never was intended by God to secure men in their unrighteousness, but to save them from it.

Fifthly, Holiness has a mighty influence upon others. When this appears with power in the lives of the Christians, it works mightily upon the spirits of men; this stops the mouths of the ungodly, who are ready to reproach religion, and throw the dirt of professors' sins on the face of profession itself. They say frogs will cease croaking when a light is brought near to them: the light of a holy conversation hangs, as it were, a padlock on profane lips, yea, it forceth them to acknowledge God in them. 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,' Matt. v. 16: yea, more, this would not only stop their mouths, but be a means to open their very hearts to the embracing of Christ and his grace. One reason why such shoals of souls came into the net of the gospel in primitive times was, because then the divinity of the gospel doctrine appeared in the divinity and holiness of Christians' lives. Justin Martyr, when converted, professed, 'that the holiness which shined in Christians' lives, and patience, that triumphed over their enemies' cruelty at their deaths, made him conclude the doctrine of the gospel was truth.' Yea, Julian himself, as vile a wretch as he was, could say, that the Christian religion came to be propagated so much, *Propter Christionorum erga omnes beneficia*, because Christians were a people that did good to all, and hurt to none. I am sure we find by woful experience, that in these debauched times, wherein religion is so bespattered with frequent scandals, yea, a common looseness of professors, it is hard to get any that are out to come under the net of the gospel. Some beasts there are, that if they have once blown on a pasture, others will hardly eat of that grass for some while after. Truly I have had some such sad thoughts as these concerning our unhappy times, that till the ill savour which the pride, contentions, errors, and looseness of professors now-a-days have left upon the truths and ordinances of Christ be worn off, there is little hopes of any great coming-in of new converts. The minister cannot be always preaching; two or three hours may be in a week he spends among his people in the pulpit, holding the glass of the gospel before their faces; but the lives of professors, these preach all the week long; if they were but holy and exemplary, they would be as a repetition of the preacher's sermon to their families and neighbours among whom they converse, and keep the sound of his doctrine continually ringing in their ears. This would give Christians an amiable advantage in doing good to their carnal neighbours by counsel and reproof, which now is seldom done, and when done, it proves to little purpose, because not backed with their own exemplary walking. 'It behoves him,' saith Tertullian, 'that would counsel or reprove another, to guard his speech;' *Autoritate propriæ conversationis, ne dicta factis deficientibus erubescant;* with the authority of his own conversation, lest, wanting that what he says puts himself to the blush. We do not love one that hath a stinking breath should come very near us; and truly we count one comes very near us that reproves us; such, therefore, had need have a sweet-scented life.

Digitized by Google

Reproofs are good physic, but they have an unpleasant farewell; it is hard for men not to throw them back on the face of him that gives them. Now nothing is more powerful to keep a reproof from thus coming back than the holiness of the person that reproves. 'Let the righteous smite me,' saith David, 'it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head,' Psa. cxli. 5. See how well it is taken from such hand, from the authority that holiness carries with it. None but a vile wretch will smite a righteous man with reproach for smiting him with a reproof, if softly laid on, and like oil fomented, and wrought into him, as it should, with compassion and love to his soul. Thus we see how influential the power of holiness would be unto the wicked, neither would it be less upon our brethren and fellow-Christians. When one Christian sees holiness sparkle in the life of another he converses with, he shall find his own grace spring within him, as the babe in Elizabeth at the salutation of Mary. Truly one eminently holy is enough to put life into a whole society; on the contrary, the error or looseness of one professor endangers the whole company that are acquainted with him. Therefore we have so strict a charge, Heb. xii., 'Follow peace and holiness, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.' It is spoken to professors. The heathen's drunkenness, uncleanness, unrighteous walking, did not so much endanger them; but when a 'root of bitterness springs up' among professors themselves, this hazards the defiling of many. A scab on the wolf's back is not so dangerous to the sheep, because they will not easily be drawn among such company; but when it gets into the flock, among professors that feed together, pray, hear, and walk in fellowship together, now is the fear it will spread. A loose, erroneous professor, doth the devil more service in this kind than a whole troop of such as pretend to no religion. The devil gets no credit by them. There are many errors and sinful practices which have long lain upon his hands, and he could not put them off, till he found this way to employ some professors as his brokers, to commend them to others, and disperse them for him: and if such do not ensnare and defile others by their unholy walking, to be sure they grieve their hearts, and put them to shame in the world. O how Cnristians hang down their heads upon the scandal of any of their company! as all the patriarchs were troubled when the cup was found in one of their sacks. And it is no small matter to make sad the hearts of God's people. In a word, he that keeps not up in some measure the power of a holy life, renders himself useless and unprofitable. Wouldst thou pray for others? A heathen could bid a wicked man hold his peace, and not let the gods know he was in the ship when the storm was on them. Wouldst thou speak a word of comfort to any mournful soul? O how unsavoury are comforts dropping from such a mouth! Wouldst thou counsel another? Thy friend will think thou dost but jest, whatever thou sayest in commendation of holiness; he will not believe that thou thyself dost think it good, for then thou wouldst take that thyself which thou commendest to another.

Sixthly, Holiness and righteousness, they are the pillars of kingdoms and nations; who are they that keep the house from falling on a people's head but the righteous in a nation? Ten righteous men, could they have been found in Sodom, had blown over the storm of fire and brimstone that in a few hours entombed them in their own ashes; yea, the destroying angel's hands were tied up, as it were while but one righteous Lot was among them: 'Haste thee, I can do nothing till thou art come thither,' Gen. xix. 22. Rehoboam and his kingdom for three years were strengthened, and might have been three and twenty, if he had not by his unrighteousness pulled it down upon himself and people; for his unhappiness is dated from the very time of his departure from God, 2 Chron. xi. 16. Josiah, when he came to the crown, found the kingdom of Judah tumbling apace to ruin, yet because his heart was set for God, and prepared to walk before him, God took his bail, as I may so say, for that wretched people, even when they were under an arrest from God, and almost at the prison door, so that their safety was in a manner bound up in his life; for soon after his decease all went to rack among them. It was an heroic speech of Luther who foresaw a black cloud of God's judgments coming over the land of Germany, but told some of his friends, 'That he would do his best to keep it from falling in his days;' yea,

Digitized by Google

he believed it should not; 'And,' said he, 'when I am gone, let them that come after me look to it.' This poor nation of England hath, for many generations in a succession, had a number of precious, righteous ones, who have, through God's grace, walked close with God, and been kept in a great degree unspotted from the defilements of the ungodly times they lived in. These were the Atlases of their several ages; these have often found favour of God to beg the life of this nation, when its neck hath been on the very block. But they are gone, or wearing away apace, and a new generation coming in their room; unhappy would the day be called when you were born, if you should be the men and women that, by degenerating from the power of holiness, should cut the banks, which was their chief care to keep up, and so let in a desolating judgment to overflow the land. That heir we count unworthy of his birth and patrimony, who, by his debauched courses, prodigally makes away that estate which by the care and providence of his ancestors was, through many descents, at last transmitted to him; but, together with the honour of the family, unhappily ends in him. If ever any age was like to do thus by the place of their nativity, this present, wherein our sad lot, is cast to live, is it. How low is the power of holiness sunk among us, to what it was but in the last generation! Religion, alas! runs low and dreggy among professors, God he knows, that will not long suffer it. If Egypt knows a dearth is coming, by the low ebbing of the Nile, surely we may see that a judgment is coming, by the low fall of the power of godliness. There are great complaints of what men have lost in these hurling times; some bemoan their lost places and estates, others the lost lives of their friends in the wars; but professors may claim justly the first place of all the mourners of the times, to lament their lost love to the truths of Christ, worship of Christ, servants of Christ; yea, that universal decay which appears in their holy walking before God and man. This is sad indeed; but that which adds a fearful aggravation to this is, that we degenerate, and grow loose at a time when we are under the highest engagements for holiness that ever people were. We are a people redeemed from many deaths and dangers; and when better might God expect us to be a righteous nation? It is an ill time for a person to fall a stealing and pilfering again, as soon as the rope is off his neck, and he let safely come down that ladder, from which he was even now like to be turned off. Surely it added to righteous Noah's sin, to be drunk as soon almost as he was set on shore, when a little before he had seen a whole world sinking before his eyes; and he, the privileged person, left by God to plant the world again with a godly seed. O sirs, the earth hath hardly yet drunk in the rivers of blood that hath been shed in our land! The cities and towns have hardly got out of their ruins, which the miseries of war laid them in. The moans of the fatherless and husbandless, whom the sword bereaved of these their dearest relations, are not yet silenced by their own death; yea, can our own frights and scares which we were amazed with when we saw the nation, like a candle lighted at both ends, on a flame, and every day the fire coming nearer and nearer to ourselves, be so soon forgotten? Now, that at such a time as this, a nation, and that the professing part of it, should grow looser, more proud, covetous, contentious, wanton in their principles, and careless in their lives, this must be for a lamentation. We have little cause to boast of our peace and plenty, when the result of our deliverance is to deliver us up to commit such abominations; this is as if one whose quartan ague is gone, but leaving him deep in a dropsy, should rejoice that his ague hath left him, little thinking that when it went, it left him a worse guest in its place. An unhappy change it is, to have war, pestilence, and famine, removed, and to be left swollen up with pride, error, and libertinism. Again, we are people who have made more pretensions to righteousness and holiness than our forefathers ever did; what else meant the many prayers to God, and petitions to man, for reformation? What interpretation could a charitable heart make of our putting ourselves under the bond of a covenant, to endeavour for personal reformation, and then national, but that we meant in earnest to be a more righteous nation than ever before? This made such a loud report in foreign parts, that our neighbour-churches were set a wondering to think what these glorious beginnings might ripen to; so that now, having put forth these leaves, and told both God and man by them, what fruit was to be looked for from us, our present state must needs be nigh unto cursing, for

Digitized by Google

disappointing the just expectations of both. Nothing can save the life of this our nation, or lengthen out its tranquillity in mercy to it, but the recovery of the much decayed power of holiness. This, as a spring of new blood to a weak body, would, though almost a dying, revive it, and procure many happy days; yea, more happy days to come over its head, than yet it hath seen; but, alas! as we are degenerating from bad to worse, we do but die lingeringly, every day we fetch our breath shorter and shorter; if the sword should but be drawn again among us, we have hardly strength to hold out another fit.

CHAPTER VI.

CONTAINS THE FIRST INSTANCE, WHEREIN THE CHRISTIAN IS TO EXPRESS THE POWER OF HOLINESS, AND THAT IS IN HIS BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SIN; BRANCHED INTO SEVERAL PARTICULARS.

THE second particular into which the point was branched comes now to be taken into hand; and that was to instance in some particulars wherein every Christian is to express the power of a holy and righteous life. Now this I shall do under several heads.

First, Christian, be sure thou maintainest the power of holiness in thy contest with sin, which thou art to express in these particulars following.

First, Thou must not only refuse to commit broad sins, but shun the appearance of sin also; this is to walk in the power of holiness. The dove doth not only fly from the hawk, but will not smell so much as a single feather that falls from the hawk. It should be enough to scare the holy soul from any enterprise, if it be but *male coloratum*. We are commanded 'to hate the garment spotted with the flesh,' Jude 23. A cleanly person will not only refuse to wallow in the dunghill, but is careful also that he doth not get so much as a spot on his clothes as he is eating his meat. The Christian's care should be to keep, as his conscience pure, so his name pure, which is done by avoiding all appearance of evil. Bernard's three questions are worth the asking ourselves in any enterprise: *An liceat? an deceat? an expediat?* 'Is it lawful?' may I do it, and not sin? 'Is it becoming me, a Christian?' may I do it, and not wrong my profession? that work which would suit a mean man, would it become a prince? 'Should such a one as I flee?' said Nehemiah, nobly, Nehem. vi. 12. Lastly, 'Is it expedient?' may I do it, and not offend my weak brother? There are some things we must deny ourselves of for others' sake; though a man could sit his horse, and run him full speed without danger to himself, yet he would do very ill to come scouring through a town, where children are in the way, that may be, before he is aware, ridden over by him, and killed. Thus some things thou mayest do, and without sin to thee, if there were no weak Christians in thy way to ride over, and so bruise their tender consciences, and grieve their spirits. But, alas! this is too narrow a path for many mere professors to walk in now a-days; they must have more room and scope for their loose hearts, or else they and their profession must part. Liberty is the Diana of our times. O what apologies are made for some suspicious practices; long hair, gaudy, garish apparel, spotted faces, naked breasts! these have been called to the bar in former times, and censured by sober and solid Christians, as things at least suspicious, and of 'no good report;' but now they have hit on a more favourable jury, that find them not guilty; yea, many are so fond of them, that they think Christian liberty is wronged in their censure. Professors are so far from a holy jealousy, that should make them watch their hearts, lest they go too far, that they stretch their consciences to come up to the full length of their tether; as if he were the brave Christian that could come nearest the pit of sin, and not fall in; as in the Olympian games, he bore the garland away, that could drive his chariot nearest the mark, and not knock on it. If this were so, Paul mistook when he bade Christians 'abstain from all appearance of evil,' 1 Thess. v. 22; he should rather have said by these men's divinity, 'abstain' not from the appearance,' only take heed of what is in itself grossly evil. But he that can venture on the appearance of evil, under pretence of liberty, may, for aught I know, commit that which is more grossly evil, under some appearance of good; it is not hard, if a man will be at the cost, to put a good colour on a rotton stuff, and practice also.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Thou must not only endeavour against all sin, but that on noble principles; here lies the power of holiness. Many forbear to sin upon such an unworthy account that God will not thank them for it another day. As it is in the actions of piety and charity, God makes no account of them, except he be interested in them; when we fast or pray, God asks, 'Do you fast and pray to me, even to me?' Zech. vii. 5. When we give alms, 'a cup of cold water,' for his sake, given in the 'name of a disciple,' is more valued by him, than a cup of gold for private and low ends, Matt. x. 42; so in sin, God looks that his authority should conclude, and his love constrain us to renounce it. Before the commandments, as princes before their proclamations prefix their arms and royal names, God sets his glorious name: 'God spake all these words, and said,' &c., Exod. xx.; and why this? but that we should sanctify his name in all we do. A master may well think himself despised by that servant that still goes on, when he bids him leave off such a work, but has done presently at the entreaty of another. O how many are there that go on to sin, for all that God says to the contrary! but when their credit bids, for shame of the world, to give over such a practice, they can cease presently; when their profit speaks, it is heard and obeyed. O sirs, take heed of this! God expects his servants should not only do what he commands, but this at his command, and his only. And as in abstaining from evil, so in mourning for sins committed by us; if we will be Christians indeed, we must take in, yea, prefer God's concernments before our own. Indeed it were to be wished, that some were so kind to their own souls, as to mourn for themselves when they have sinned; that they would cry out with Lamech, Gen. iv. 23, 'I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.' Many have such brawny consciences, they do not so much as complain they have hurt themselves by their sins, but little of the power of holiness appears in all this; there may be a great cry in the conscience, I am damned! I have undone myself! and the dishonour that is cast upon God by him not laid to heart. You remember what Joab said to David, taking on heavily for Absalom's death; 'I perceive,' said he, 'if Absalom had been alive, and all we had died this day, then it hath pleased thee well,' 2 Sam xix. 6. Thus we might say to such selfish mourners, We perceive that if thou couldest but save the life of thy soul from eternal death and damnation, though the glory of God miscarried, thou couldest be pleased well enough. But know that a gracious soul's mourning runs in another channel: 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned,' is holy David's moan. There is a great difference between a servant that works for another, and one that is his own man as we say: the latter puts all his losses upon his own head—so much, saith he, I have lost by such a ship, so much by a bargain; but the servant that trades with his master's stock, he, when any loss comes, puts it on his master's account—so much I have lost of my master's goods. O Christian, think of this; thou art but a servant, all the stock thou tradest with is not thine, but thy God's: and therefore when thou fallest into any sin, beware it is a wrong to him: So much alas! I have dishonoured my God; his talents I have wasted, his name I have wounded, his Spirit I have grieved.

Thirdly, He must not only abstain from acting a sin, but also labour to mortify it. A wound may be hid, when it is not healed; covered, and yet not cured; some men they are like unskilful physicians, who rather drive in the disease, than drive out the cause of the disease: corruption thus left in the bosom, like lime unslaked, or a humour unpurged, is sure at one time or other to take fire and break out, though now it lies peaceably, as powder in the barrel, and makes no noise. I have read that the opening of a chest where some clothes were laid up, not very well aired and cleared from the infection that had been in the house, was the cause of a great plague in Venice, after they had lain many years there without doing hurt. I am sure we see for want of true mortification, many, after they have walked so long unblamably, as to gain the reputation of being saints in the opinion of others, upon some occasion, like the opening of the chest, have fallen sadly into abominable practices; and therefore it behoves us not to satisfy ourselves with anything less than a work of mortification, and that followed on from day to day. 'I protest, saith Paul, 'by my rejoicing in Christ, I die daily;' here was a man who walked in the power of holiness. Sin is like the beast, Rev. xiii. 3, which seemed at one

Digitized by Google

time as if it would presently die of its wound, and by and by it was strangely healed so as to recover again. Many a saint, for want of keeping a tight rein, and that constantly, over some corruption, which they have thought they had got the mastery of, have been thrown out of the saddle, and by it dragged dangerously into temptation; unable to resist the fury of lust when it has got head, till they have broken their bones with some sad fall into sin. If thou wouldst, Christian, shew the power of holiness, never give over mortifying work, no, not when thy corruptions play least in thy sight. He that is inclined to a disease, gout, stone, or the like, he must not only take physic when he hath a fit actually upon him, but ever and anon should be taking something good against it; so should the Christian, not only when he finds his corruption stirring, but every day keep his soul in a course of spiritual physic, against the growing of it; this is holiness in its power. Many professors do with their souls in this respect, as deceitful surgeons with their patients, lay on a healing plaster one day, and a contrary the next day, that sets the cure back, more than the other set it forward; take heed of this, except thou meanest not only to bring the power of holiness into danger, but the very life and truth of it into question in thy soul.

Fourthly, He must, as endeavour to mortify corruption, so to grow and advance in the contrary grace. Every sin hath its opposite grace, as every posion hath its antidote; he that will walk in the power of holiness, must not only labour to make avoidance of sin, but to get possession for the contrary grace. We read of a house that stood empty, Matt. xii. 44: the unclean spirit went out, but the Holy Spirit came not in. That is, when a man is a mere negative Christian he ceaseth to do evil in some ways he hath formerly walked in, but he learns not to do good. This is to lose heaven with short shooting; God will not ask us what we were not, but what we were; not to swear and curse will not serve our turn, but thou wilt be asked, Didst thou bless and sanctify God's name? It will not suffice thou didst not persecute Christ, but didst thou receive him? Thou didst not hate his saints, but didst thou love them? Thou didst not drink, but wert thou filled with the Spirit? He is the skilful physician, who at the same time that he evacutes the disease, doth also comfort and strengthen nature; and he the true Christian, that doth not content himself with a bare laying aside evil customs and practices, but labours to walk in the exercise of the contrary graces. Art thou discomposed with impatience, haunted with a discontented spirit under any affliction? Think it not enough to silence thy heart from quarrelling with God, but leave not till thou canst bring it sweetly to rely on God. Holy David drove it thus far; he did not only chide his soul for being disquited, but he charges it to trust in God, Psa. xlii. 5. Hast thou any grudgings in thy heart against thy brother? Think it not enough to quench these sparks of hell-fire, but labour to kindle a heavenly fire of love to him, so as to set thee a praying heartily for him. I have known one that when he had some envious unkind thoughts stirring in him, against any one, (and who so holy as may not find such vermin sometimes creeping about him?) he would not stay long from the throne of grace, where, that he might enter the stronger protest against them, would most earnestly pray for the increase of those good things in them, which he before had seemed to grudge; and so revenged himself of those envious lustings, which at any time rose in his heart against others.

Fifthly, He must have a public spirit against the sins of others.

A good subject doth not only labour to live quietly under his prince's government himelf, but is ready to serve his prince against those that will not. True holiness, as true charity, begins at home, but it doth not confine itself within its own doors: it hath a zeal against sin abroad. He that is of a neutral spirit, and Gallio like, cares not what dishonor God hath from others, calls in question the zeal he expresseth against sin in his own bosom. When David would know the temper of his own heart, the furthest discovery, by all his search, that he could make of the sincerity of it, is the zeal against the sins of others: 'Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with a perfect hatred, I count them mine enemies,' Psa. cxxxix. 21, 22. Having done this, he entreats God himself to ransack his heart: 'Search me and try me, O God, if there be any wicked way found in me,' &c., ver. 23. As if he had said, Lord, my line will not reach to

Digitized by Google

fathom my heart any farther; and, therefore, if it be possible that yet any evil way may shroud itself under this, tell me, and lead me into the way everlasting.

Sixthly, The Christian, when he shews most zeal against sin, and hath greatest victory over it, even then must he renounce all trusting and glorying in this. The excellency of gospel holiness consists in self-denial. 'Though I were perfect,' saith Job, 'yet would I not know my soul,' Job ix. 21; that is, I would not be conceited and proud of my innocence. When a man is lift up with any excellency he hath, we say, he knows it; he hath excellent parts, but he knows it; that is, he reflects too much on himself, and sees his own face too often in the glass of his own perfections. They who climb lofty mountains, find it safest, the higher they ascend, the more to bow, and stoop with their bodies; and so does the Spirit of Christ teach the saints, as they get higher in their victories over corruption, to bow lowest in self-denial, Jude 21; the saints are bid there, 'to keep themselves in the love of God,' and then to wait, and 'look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus unto eternal life.' And Hosea x. 12, 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.' We sow on earth, we reap in heaven. The seed we are to sow is Righteousness and holiness, which when we have done with greatest care and cost, we must not expect our reward from the hand of our righteousness, but God's mercy.

CHAPTER VII.

A SECOND INSTANCE, WHEREIN THE POWER OF HOLINESS IS TO APPEAR IN THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE, I. E. IN THE DUTIES OF GOD'S WORSHIP.

SECONDLY, The Christian must exert the power of holiness in the duties of God's worship. The same light that shews us a God, convinceth he is to be worshipped; and not only so, but that he will be worshipped in a holy manner also. God was very choice in all that belonged to his worship under the law. If he hath a tabernacle, the place of worship, it must be made of the choicest materials; the workmen employed to make it, must be rarely gifted for the purpose; the sacrifices to be offered up, the best in every kind, the males of the flock, the best of the beasts, the fat of the inwards, not the offals; the persons that attend upon the Lord, and minister unto him, they must be peculiarly holy. What is the gospel of all this, but that God is very curious in his worship? if in any action of our lives we be more holy than others, sure it is to be when we have to do with God immediately. Now this holiness in duties of worship should appear in these particulars.

First, In making conscience of one duty as well as another, the Christian must encompass all within his religious walk. It is dangerous to perform one duty, that we may dispense with ourselves in the neglect of another. Partiality is hateful to God, especially in the duties of religion, which have all a divine stamp upon them. There is no ordinance of God's appointment which he doth not bless to his people, and we must not reject what God owns; yea, God communicates himself with great variety to his saints, now in this, anon in that, on purpose to keep up the esteem of all in our hearts. The spouse seeks her beloved in secret duties at home, and finds him not; then she goes to the public, and meets him 'whom her soul loves,' Cant. iii. 4. Daniel, no doubt, had often visited the throne of grace, and been a long trader in that duty: but God reserved the fuller manifestation of his love, and opening some secrets to him, until he did, to ordinary prayer, join extraordinary fasting and prayer; then the commandment came forth, and a messenger from heaven despatched to acquaint him with God's mind and heart, Dan. x. 3, compared with ver. 23. There is no duty, but the saints find at one time or another the Spirit of God breathing sweetly in, and filling their souls from it, with more than ordinary refreshing. Sometimes the child sucks its milk from this breast, sometimes from that. David in meditation, while he was musing, finds a heavenly heat kindling in his bosom, till at last the fire breaks out, Psa. xxxix. 3. To the eunuch, in reading of the word, is sent Philip to join to his chariot, Acts vii. 27, 28. To the apostles, Christ makes known himself in breaking of bread, Luke xxiv. 35. The disciples walking to Emmaus, and conferring together, presently have Christ fall in with them, who helps them to untie those knots which they were posed with, Luke xxiv. 15. Cornelius, at duty in his house, has a vision from

Digitized by Google

heaven, to direct him in the way he should walk, Acts x. 3. Take heed, Christian, therefore, thou neglectest not any one duty; how knowest thou but that is the door at which Christ stands waiting to enter at into thy soul? The Spirit is free, do not bind him to this or that duty, but wait on him in all. It is not wisdom to let any water run beside thy mill, which may be useful to set thy soul agoing heavenward. May be, Christian, thou findest little in those duties thou performest, they are empty breasts to thy soul. It is worth thy inquiry, whether there be not some other thou neglectest. Thou hearest the word with little profit may be; I pray tell me, dost thou not neglect sacraments? I am sure too many do, and that upon weak grounds, God knows. And wilt thou have God meet thee in one ordinance, who durst not meet him in another? Or if thou frequentest all public ordinances, is not God a great stranger to thee at home, in thy house and closet? What communion dost thou hold with him in private duties? Here is a hole wide enough to lose all thou gettest in public, if not timely mended. Samuel would not sit down to feast with Jesse and his sons, till David, though the youngest son, was fetched, who was the only son that was wanting, 2 Sam. xvi. 11. If thou wouldest have God's company in any ordinance, thou must wait on him in all; he will not have any willingly neglected. O fetch back that duty which thou hast sent away! though least in thy eye, yet, it may be, it is that God means to crown with his choicest blessing in thy soul,

Secondly, In a close and vigorous pursuance of those ends for which God hath appointed them. Now there is a double end which God chiefly aims at in the duties of his worship. First, God intends that by them we should do our homage to him as our sovereign Lord. Secondly, he intends them to be as means through which he may let out himself into the bosoms of his children, and communicate the choicest of his blessings to them. Now here the power of holiness puts forth itself, when the Christians attends narrowly to reach these ends in every duty he performs.

First, God appoints them for this end, that we may do our homage to him as our sovereign Lord. Were there not a worship paid to God, how should we declare, and make appear that we hold our life and being of him? One of the first things that God taught Adam, and Adam his children, was divine worship. Now if we will do this holily, we must make it our chief care so to perform every duty, that by it we may sanctify his name in it, and give him the glory due unto it. A subject may offer a present after such a ridiculous fashion to his prince, that he may count himself rather scorned than honoured by him. The soldiers bowed the knee to Christ, but they mocked him, Matt. xxvii. 29; and so does God reckon many do by him, even while they worship him. By the carriage and behaviour of ourselves in religious duties we speak what our thoughts are of God himself. He that performs them with a holy awe upon his spirit, and comes to them filled with faith and fear, with joy and trembling, he declares plainly that he believes God to be a great God, and a good God, a glorious Majesty and a gracious; but he that is slightly and slovenly in them, tells God himself to his face, that he hath mean and low thoughts of him. The misbehaviour of a person in religious duties ariseth from his misapprehensions of God, whom he worships. What is engraven on the seal, you shall surely see printed on the wax: and what thoughts the heart hath of God are stamped on the duties the man performs. Abel shewed himself to be a holy man, and Cain appeared a wicked wretch, in their sacrifice; and how? but in this; that Abel aimed at that end which God intends in his worship, the sanctifying his name, which Cain minded not at all; as may appear by comparing Abel's sacrifice with his, in two particulars.

First, Abel is very choice in the matter of his sacrifice, not any of the flock that comes first to hand, but the firstlings; neither did he offer the lean of them to God, and save the fat for himself, but gives God the best of the best. But of Cain's offering, no such care is recorded to be taken by him; it is only said, 'that he brought of the fruit of the ground, an offering unto the Lord,' Gen. iv. 3, 4; but not a word that it was the first fruit, or best fruit.

Again, Abel did not put God off with a beast or two for a sacrifice, but with them gives his heart also: 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,' Heb. xi. 4; he gave God the inward worship of his soul:

Digitized by Google

and this was it that God took so kindly at his hands, for which he obtained a testimony from God himself, that he was righteous. Whereas Cain thought it enough, if not too much, to give him a little of the fruit of the ground; had the wretch but considered who God was, and what his end in requiring an offering at his hands, he could not have thought rationally, that a handful or two of corn was that which he prized, or looked at any further, than to be a sign of that inward and spiritual worship, which he expected to come along with the outward ceremony. But he shewed what base and unworthy thoughts he had of God, and accordingly he dealt with him. O Christians! remember when you engage in any duty of religion, that you go to do your homage to God, who will be worshipped like himself. 'Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.' This made David so curious about the temple, which he had in his heart to build, 'because the palace was not for man, but the Lord God,' 1 Chron. xxix. 1; therefore, ver. 2, he saith, 'He prepared with all his might for the house of his God.' Thus should the gracious soul say, when going to any duty of religion; It is not man, but the Lord God, I am going to minister unto, and therefore I must be serious and solemn, holy and humble, &c.

Secondly, The second end God hath appointed divine ordinances and religious duties for, is to be a means whereby he may let out himself to his people, and communicate the choicest of his blessings into their bosoms. 'There,' saith the Psalmist, speaking of the mountain of Zion, where the temple stood, the place of God's worship, 'commanded he the blessing, even life for evermore,' Psa. cxxxiii. 3; that is, he hath appointed the blessing of life spiritual, grace and comfort, which at last shall swell into life eternal, to issue and stream thence. The saints ever drew their water out of these wells: 'Their souls shall live that seek the Lord,' Psa. lxix. 32; and their souls must need die, that seek not God here. The husbandman may as well expect a crop, where he never ploughed and sowed; and the tradesman to grow rich, who never opens his shop doors to let customers in; as he to thrive in grace or comfort, that converseth not with the duties of religion. The great things God doth for his people, are got in communion with him. Now here appears the power of holiness, when a soul makes this his business, which he follows close, and attends to, in duties of religion, to receive some spiritual advantage from God by them; as a scholar, knowing he is sent to the university to get learning, gives up himself to pursue this, and neglects other things; it is not riches or pleasure he looks after, but learning. Thus the gracious soul bestirs him, and flies from one duty to another, as the bee from flower to flower, to store itself with more and more grace: it is not credit and reputation to be thought a great saint, but to be indeed such, that he takes all this pains for. The Christian is compared to a merchantman, that trades for rich pearls; he is to go to ordinances, as the merchant that sails from port to port, not to see places, but to take in his lading, some here, some there. A Christian should be as much ashamed to return empty from his traffic with ordinances, as the merchant to come home without his lading. But, alas! how little is this looked after by many that pass for great professors! who are like some idle persons that come to the market, not to buy provision, and carry home what they want, but to gaze and look upon what is there to be sold, to no purpose. O my brethren, take heed of this! Idleness is bad anywhere, but worst in the market-place, where so many are at work before thy eyes, whose care for their souls both adds to thy sin, and will, another day, to thy shame. Dost thou not see others grow rich in grace and comfort, by their trading with those ordinances from which thou comest away poor and beggarly? And canst thou see it without blushing? If thou hadst but a heart to propound the same end to thy soul when thou comest, thou mightest speed as well as they. God allows a free trade to all that do value Christ and his grace, according to their preciousness. 'Ho! every one that is athirst, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price,' Isa. lv. 1. The Spirit of God seems, in the judgment of some, to allude to a custom in maritime towns; when a ship comes with commodities to be sold, they use to cry them about the town, Ho! all that would have such and such commodities, let them come to the

Digitized by Google

water side, where they are to be had at such a price. Thus Christ calls every one that sees his need of Christ, and his graces, 'to the ordinances,' where these are to be freely had of all that come to them, for this very end.

CHAPTER VIII.

A THIRD INSTANCE, WHEREIN THE POWER OF HOLINESS MUST APPEAR, AND THAT IS IN THE CHRISTIAN'S WORLDLY EMPLOYMENTS.

THIRDLY, the Christian must express the power of holiness in his particular calling, and worldly employments, that therein he is conversant with. Holiness must be written upon those, as well as on his religious duties. He that observes the law of building, is as exact in making a kitchen, as in making a parlour; so by the law of Christianity, we must be as exact in our worldly business, as in duties of worship: 'Be ye holy in all manner of conversation,' 1 Pet. i. 15. We must not leave our religion, as some do their Bibles, at church; as in man, the highest faculty, which is reason, guides man's lowest actions, even those which are common to beasts, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, man doth, that is, should, if he will deserve his own name, exercise these acts as reason directs, he should show himself in them a rational creature; so grace, that is the highest principle in a Christian, is to steer and guide him in those actions that are common to man, as man. The Christian is not to buy and sell as a mere man, but as a Christian man. Religion is not like that statesman's gown, which, when he went to recreate himself, he would throw off, and say, 'There lie Lord Treasurer awhile;' no, wherever the Christian is, whatever he is a-doing, he must keep his religion on, I mean, do it holily. He must not do that in which he cannot shew himself a Christian. Now the power of holiness puts forth itself in our particular callings these ways, but take them conjunctive, the beauty of holiness appears in the symmetry of all the parts together.

First, When the Christian is diligent in his particular calling. When God calls us to be Christians, he calls us indeed out of the world, as to our affections, but not out of the world, as to employment. It is true, when Elisha was called, he left his plough, and the apostles their nets; but not as they were called to be saints, but because they were called to office in the church; though some in our days could find in their hearts to send the officers of the church to the plough again, but upon how little reason, let themselves judge, who find one trade, if it be well followed, and managed with a full stock, enough to find them work all the week; and sure the minister, that hath to do with, yea, provide for more souls, than they bodies, may find his head and heart as full of work in his calling, from one end of the year to the other, as any of them all. But I am speaking to the private Christian. Thou canst not be holy, if thou art not diligent in a particular calling. The law of man counts him a vagrant, that hath not a particular abiding place; and the word of God counts him a disorderly person that hath not a particular calling, wherein to move and act for God's glory, and the good of others: 'We hear there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all,' 2 Thess. iii. 11. God would have his people profitable, like the sheep which doth the very ground good it feeds on. Every one should be the better for a Christian. When Onesimus was converted, he became profitable to Paul and Philemon also, Philem. 11; to Paul as a Christian, to Philemon as a servant; grace made him of a runaway a diligent servant. An idle professor is a scandalous professor. An idle man does none good, and himself most hurt.

Secondly, When he is not only diligent, but for conscience' sake. There are many are free enough of their pains in their particular callings, they need no spur; but what sets them on work? Is it conscience, because God commands it? Oh no! then they would be diligent in their general calling also; they would pray as hard as they work; they then would knock off, as well as fall on at God's command; if conscience were the key that opened their shop on the week-day, it would shut it on the Lord's day. When we see a man, like the hawk, fly after the world's prey, and will not come to God's lure, though conscience bids in his name come off, and wait on thy God in this duty in thy family, that in thy closet, but still goes on his worldly chase, he shews plain enough whose errand he goes on; not of conscience, but his lusts. But if thou

Digitized by Google

wilt walk in the power of holiness, thou must be diligent in thy calling on a religious account: that which makes thee 'fervent in prayer,' must make thee 'not slothful in business.' Thou mayest say, this is the place God hath set me in; I am but his servant in my own shop; and here I must serve him as I would have my apprentice or child serve me, yea, much more, for they are not mine so much as I am his.

Thirdly, when he expects the success of his labour from God, and accordingly if he speeds, gives his humble thanks to God. Indeed they go together; he that doth not the one, will not the other. The worldling that goes not through his closet, by prayer, into his shop in the morning, when he enters upon his business, no wonder if he returns not at night by his closet in thankfulness to God. He began without God, it were strange if he should end in him. The spider that spins her web out of her own bowels, dwells in it when she hath done; and men that carry on their enterprises by their own wit and care, entitle themselves to what they think they have done. They will sooner sacrifice (as they 'to their net and drag,' Job viii.; Habak. i. 16), to their own wisdom and industry, than to God. Such a wretch I have lately heard of in our days, who being by a neighbour excited to thank God for a rich crop of corn he had standing on his ground, atheistically replied, 'Thank God! nay, rather thank my dung-cart.' The speech of a dung-hill spirit, more filthy than the muck in his cart; but if thou wilt be a Christian, thou must 'acknowledge God in all thy ways, not leaning to thine own understanding;' and this will direct thee to him, when success crowns thy labours, to crown God with the praise. Jacob laboured as diligently, and took as much pains for the estate he had at last, as another; yet laying the foundation of all in prayer, and expecting the blessing from heaven, Gen. xxviii. 20, he ascribes all that fair estate he at last was possessed of to the mercy and truth of God, whom he had in his poor state, when with his pilgrim staff he was travelling to Padan-Aran, engaged by a solemn vow to provide for him, Gen. xxxii. 10.

Fourthly, When the Christian is content with the portion, little or much, that God upon his endeavours allots him; not content, because he cannot have it otherwise. Necessity was the heathen's schoolmaster to teach contentment, but faith must be the Christian's, whereby he acquiesces in the dispositions of God's providence with a sweet complacency, as in the will of God concerning him. Here is godliness in triumph, when the Christian can carve contentment out of God's providence, whatever the dish is that is set before him. If he gathers little, he lacks not, but is satisfied with his short meal; if he gather much, he hath nothing over; I mean not more than his grace can well digest, and turn to good nourishment; nothing over that turns to bad humours of pride and wantonness. This was the pitch Paul attained unto, Phil. iv. 14: 'He knew how to abound, and how to want.' Take contentment from godliness, and you take one of the best jewels away she wears in her bosom: 'Godliness with contentment is great gain;' not godliness with an estate, but godliness with contentment, 1 Tim. vi. 16.

Fifthly, When the Christian's particular calling doth not encroach upon his general. Truly this requires a strong guard. The world is of an encroaching nature; hard it is to converse with it, and not come into bondage to it. As Hagar, when Abraham shewed her some respect more than ordinary, began to contest with, yea, crow over, her mistress, so will our worldly employments justle with our heavenly, if we keep not a strict hand over them. Now the power of holiness appears here in two things; first, when the Christian suffers not his worldly business to eat up his time for communion with God, but keeps it inviolable from the sacrilegious hands of the world. The Christian may observe, that if he will listen to it, he shall never think of setting about any religious duty, but some excuse or other to put it off will present itself to his thoughts; this thing must be just now done, that friend spoken with, or customer waited for; so that, as the wise man saith, 'He that observeth the wind shall not sow, and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap,' Eccl. xi. 4; so he that will regard what his own sloth, worldly interest, and fleshly parts suggest, he shall never pray, meditate, or hold communion with God in any other religious duty. O it is sad! when the master must ask the man leave when to eat, and when not; when the Christian must take his orders from the world, when to wait on

Digitized by Google

God, and when not, whereas religion should give law to that. Then holiness is in its power, as Samson in his strength, when it can snap asunder these excuses that would keep him from his God, as easily as he did his cords of flax: when the Christian can make his way into the presence of God through the throng of worldly encumbrances. 'Behold,' saith David, 'I have in my trouble prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver,' &c., 1 Chron. xxii. 14. He had ways enough to dispose of his treasures if he would have been discouraged from the work: he might have had a fair apology from the wars he was all his reign involved in, which were continually draining his exchequer, to have spared this cost. But as Rome shewed her puissance in sending succours to Spain, when Hannibal was at her gates, so David will shew his zeal for God and his house by laying aside such vast sums, for the building of a temple, in the midst of troubles and expenses of his kingdom. He is the Christian indeed that lays aside a good portion of time daily, in the midst of all his worldly occasions, for communion with God: whoever he compounds with and pays short, he dares not make bold with God to serve him by halves. He shall have his time devoted to him, though others are put off with the less; like that devout man, who, when his time for his devotions came, what company soever he was with, would take his leave of them with this fair excuse, He had a friend that staid to speak with him; he meant his God. Secondly, when his worldly employments do not turn the edge of his affections, and leave a bluntness upon his spirit, as to holding communion with God. Here is holiness in the power; as the husband, when he hath been abroad all day, in this company and that, yet none of these makes him love his wife and children the less: when he comes home at night he brings his affections to them as entire as when he went out, yea, he is glad he has got from all others to them again. This is a sweet frame of spirit indeed, but alas, how hard to keep it! Canst thou say, O Christian, after thou hast passed a day amidst thy worldly profits, and been entertained with the delight and pleasures which thy full estate affords thee, that thou bringest thy whole heart to thy God with thee when at night thou returnest into his presence to wait on him? Thou canst say more than many can, that have some good in them. O it is hard to converse with the world all day, and shake it off at night, so as to be free to enjoy privacy with God. The world does by the Christian as the little child by the mother, if it cannot keep the mother from going out, then it will cry after her to go with her; if the world cannot keep us from going to religious duties, then it will cry to be taken along with us, and much ado to part it and the affections.

Fourthly, The Christian must express the power of holiness in his carriage and behaviour to others, and they are either within doors or without.

CHAPTER IX.

OF EXPRESSING THE POWER OF HOLINESS, IN AND TO OUR FAMILY RELATIONS.

First, To his family relations. Much, though not all of the power of godliness, lies within doors, to those that God hath there related us unto. It is in vain to talk of holiness if we can bring no letters testimonial from our holy walking with our relations. O it is sad when they that have reason to know us best, by their daily converse with us, do speak least for our godliness! Few so impudent as to come naked into the streets: if men have anything to cover their naughtiness they will put it on when they come abroad. But what art thou within doors? What care and conscience to discharge thy duty to thy near relations? He is a bad husband that hath money to spend among company abroad, but none to lay in provisions to keep his family at home. And can he be a good Christian that spends all his religion abroad, and leaves none for his nearest relations at home? that is, a great zealot among strangers, and little or nothing of God comes from him in his family? Yea, it were well if some that gain the reputation for Christians abroad, did not fall short of others that pretend not to profession in those moral duties which they should perform to their relations. There are some who are great strangers to profession, who yet are loving and kind in their way to their wives. What kind of professors then are they who are dogged and currish to the wife of their bosoms? who by their tyrannical lording it over them embitter their spirit, and make them cover the

Digitized by Google

Lord's altar with tears and weeping? There are wives to be found that are not clamorous, peevish, and froward to their husbands, who yet are far from a work of true grace in their hearts; do they then walk as becomes holiness, who trouble the whole house with their violent passions? There are servants, who, from the authority of a natural conscience, are kept from railing and reviling language, when reproved by their masters; and shall not grace keep pace with nature? Holy David knew very well how near this part of the saint's duty lies to the very heart of godliness: and, therefore, when he makes his solemn vow to walk holily before God, he instanceth in this, as one stage whereon he might eminently discover the graciousness of his spirit, 'I will walk within my house with a perfect heart,' Psalm ci. 2. But to instance, in a few particulars, wherein the power of holiness is to appear as to family relations.

First, In the choice of our relations, such I mean as are eligible. Some are not in our choice. The child cannot choose what father he will have, nor the father what child. But where God allows a liberty, he expects a corresponding choice.

1. Art thou godly, and wantest a service? O take heed thou shewest thy holiness in the family thou choosest, and the governors thou puttest thyself under. Inquire more whether it be a healthful air for thy soul within doors, than for thy body without. The very senseless creatures groan to serve the ungodly world, and, if capable of choosing, would count it their liberty to serve the sons of God, Rom. viii. 21. And wilt thou voluntarily, when thou mayest prevent it, run thyself under the government of such as are ungodly, who art thyself a child of God? It is hard to serve two masters, though much alike in disposition; but impossible to serve those two, a holy God and a wicked ungodly man or woman, so as to please them both. But if thou art under the roof of such a one, forget not thy duty to them, though they do forget their duty to God; possibly thy faithfulness to them may bring them to inquire after thy God, for thy sake, as Nebuchadnezzar did for Daniel's. No doubt wicked men would take up religion and the ways of God more seriously into their consideration, if there were a more heavenly lustre and beauty upon Christians' lives, in their several relations, to invite them thereunto. Sometimes a book is read the sooner for the fairness of the characters, which would have been not much looked in if the print had been naught. O how oft do we hear that the thoughts of religion are thrown away with scorn by wicked masters, when their professing servants are taken false, appear proud and undutiful, slothful or negligent! What then follows but, Is this your religion? God keep me from such religion as this! O commend the ways of God to thy carnal and ungodly master or mistress, by a clear, unblotted conversation in thy place. But withal, let me tell thee, if, doing thy utmost in thy place to promote religion in the family, thou findest that the soil is so cold that there is no visible hope of planting for God, it is time, high time, to think of transplanting thyself: for it is to be feared the place which is so bad to plant in, will not, cannot, be very good for thee to grow and thrive in.

2. Art thou a godly master? When thou takest a servant into thy house, choose for God as well as thyself. Remember there is work for God to be done by thy servant as well as thyself: and shall he be fit for thy turn that is not for his? Thou desirest the work should prosper thy servant takes in hand, dost not? And what ground hast thou, from the promise, to hope that the work should prosper in his hand that sins all the while he is doing of it? 'The ploughing of the wicked is sin,' Prov. xxi. 4. A godly servant is a greater blessing than we think on. He can work, and set God on work also, for his master's good: Gen. xxiv. 12, 'O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master.' And sure he did his master as much service by his prayer as by his prudence in that journey. If you were but to plant an orchard, you would get the best fruit trees, and not cumber your ground with drabs. There is more loss in a graceless servant in the house than a fruitless tree in the orchard. Holy David observed, while he was at Saul's court, the mischief of having wicked and ungodly servants, for with such was that unhappy king so compassed, that David compares his court to the profane and barbarous heathens,' among whom there was scarce more wickedness to be found: Psalm cxx. 6, 'Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar;' that is, among those who were as pro-

Digitized by Google

digiously wicked as any there. And no doubt but this made this gracious man in his banishment, before he came to the crown, having seen the evil of a disordered house, to resolve what he will do when God should make him the head of such a royal family: Psalm ci. 7, 'He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.' He instanceth in those sins, not as if he would spend all his zeal against these, but because he had observed them principally to abound in Saul's court, by which he had suffered so much, as you may perceive by Psalm cxx. 2, 3.

3. Art thou godly? Shew thyself so in the choice of a husband or wife. I am sure, if some, and those godly also, could bring no other testimonial for their godliness than the care they have taken in this particular, it might justly be called into question both by themselves and others. There is no one thing that gracious persons, even those recorded in Scripture, as well as others, have shewn their weakness, yea, given offence and scandal more in, than in this particular: 'The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair,' Gen. vi. 2. One would have thought the sons of God should have looked for grace in the heart, rather than beauty in the face; but we see even they sometimes turn in at the fairest sign, without much inquiring what grace is to be found dwelling within. But, Christian, let not the miscarriage of any in this particular, how holy soever otherwise, make thee less careful in thy choice. God did not leave their practice on record for thee to follow, but shun. He is but a slovenly Christian that will swallow all the saints do without paring their actions. Is it not enough that the wicked break their necks over the sins of saints? but wilt thou run upon them also to break thy shins? Point not at this man, and that godly woman, saying, They can marry into such a profane family and lie by the side of a drunkard, swearer, &c. Look to the rule, O Christian, if thou wilt keep the power of holiness. That is as clear as a sunbeam, writ in the Scripture: 'Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?' 2 Cor. vi. 14. And where he gives the widow leave to marry again, he still remembers to bound this liberty: 'To whom she will, only in the Lord,' 1 Cor. vii. 39. Mark that, 'in the Lord,' that is, in the church: all without the faith are without God in the world. The Lord's kindred and family is in the church: you marry out of the Lord when you marry out of the Lord's kindred; or 'in the Lord,' that is, in the fear of the Lord, with his leave and liking. The parents' consent is fit to be had, we all yield; and is not thy heavenly Father's? And will he ever give his consent thou shouldst bestow thyself on a beast, a sot, an earthworm? Holy men have paid dear for such matches; what a woeful plague was Delilah to Samson! and Michal none the greatest comforts to David; had he not better have married the poorest damsel in Israel, if godly, though no more with her but the clothes on her back, than such a fleering companion, that mocked him for his zeal to his God?

Secondly, In labouring to interest God in our relations. The Christian cannot indeed propagate grace to his child, nor jointure his wife in his holiness, as he may in his lands; yet he must do his utmost to entitle God to them. Why did God command Abraham that all his house should be circumcised? Surely he would have him go as far as he could to draw them into affinity with, and relation to, God. Near relations call for dear affections. Grace doth not teach us to love them less than we did, but to love them better. It turns our love into a spiritual channel, and makes us chiefly desire their eternal good. What singular thing else is in the Christian's love above others? Do not the heathens lay up estates for their children here? Are they not careful for their servants' backs and bellies, as well as others? Yes sure; but your care must exceed theirs. I remember Augustine, speaking how highly some commended his father's cost and care to educate him, even before his estate, makes this sad complaint: *Cum interea non satageret pater, qualis crescerem tibi, dummodo essem disertus, vel potius desertus a cultura tua Deus!* 'Whereas,' saith he, 'my father's drift in all was not to train me up for thee; his project was, that I might be eloquent, an orator, not a Christian.' O my brethren, if God be worth your acquaintance, is he not worth theirs also that are so near and dear to you? One house now holds you; would you not have one heaven receive you? Can you think, without trembling, that those who live together in one family should,

Digitized by Google

when the house is broken up by death, go one to hell, another to heaven? Surely you are like to have little joy from them on earth, who you fear shall not meet you in heaven. By Lycurgus's law, the father that gave no learning to his child when young, was to lose that succour which was due from his child to him in his old age. The righteousness of that law though I dare not assert, yet this I may say, what he unjustly commanded, God doth most righteously suffer, that those who do not teach their children their duty to God, lose the honour and reverence which should be paid them by their children; and so of other relations also.

Thirdly, Take heed thy relations be not a snare to thee, or thou to them. There are such sad families to be found, who do nothing else but lead one another into temptation, by drawing forth each the other's corruption, from one end of the year to the other; what can we call such families, but so many hells above ground? A man may live with as much safety to his body in a pest-house, as he can there to his soul. And truly the godly are not so far out of danger, but that the devil may make use of their passions to roil and defile one another. I am sure he is very ambitious to do them a mischief this way, and too often prevails. Abraham's fear laid the snare for Sarah his wife, who was easily persauaded to dissemble for him she loved so dearly, Gen. xii. 23. And Rebekah's vehement affection to Jacob, together with the reverence both her place and grace commanded in Jacob's heart, made him, of a plain man, become the subtile man, to deceive his father and brother; which though it was too broad a sin for him at first proposal to swallow, as appears, Gen. xxvii. 12: 'I shall seem to him to be a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing;' yet with a little art used by his mother we see the passage was widened, and down it went for all his first straining at; and yet both godly persons. Look, therefore, to thyself, that thou dost not bring sin upon thy relations. It would be a heavy affliction to thee, to see thy wife, child, or servant sick of the plague, which thou broughtest home to them; or bleeding by a wound which thou unawares gavest them; alas! better thus than be infected with sin, wounded with guilt, by thy means. And be as careful to antidote thy soul against receiving infection from them, as breathing it on them. Thy love is great to thy wife; O let it not make the apple of temptation the more fair or desirable, when offered to thee by her hand? Thou lovest thyself, yea, thy God too little if her so much, as to sin for her sake. Thou art a dutiful wife, but obey in the Lord; take heed of turning the tables of the commandments, by setting the seventh before the first. Be sure to save God's stake, before thou payest thy obedience to thy husband; say to thy soul, Can I keep God's command in obeying my husband's? In paying off debts, those should be first discharged which are due by the most, and those the greatest, obligations. And to whom thou art most deeply bound, God or thy husband, is easy to resolve; thus in all other relations. Go as far with thy relations as thou canst travel in God's company, and no further, as thou wouldst not leave thy holiness and righteousness behind thee, the loss of which is too great, that thou shouldst expect they can recompense unto thee.

Fourthly, Then holiness is in its power, as to our relations, when the Christian is careful to improve the graces of his relations, and get what good from them he can while they are with him. May be thou hast a holy father, a gracious husband or wife; let it be but a servant in the family that is godly, there is good to be got by his gracious conversation; speeches and holiness, like ointment, will betray itself, wherever it stays awhile. O Christian, if any such holy person be with thee in the family, observe what such a one in his speeches, duties of worship, behaviour under affliction, receipt of mercies, returns of sabbaths and ordinances, and such like, affords for thy instruction, quickening and promoting in the ways of holiness. The prophet bade the widow bring all the vessels she had, or could borrow, to catch what should fall from the pot of oil that she had in the house, and therewith pay her debt, 2 Kings iv. 3. Truly I think it were good counsel to some that complain (or may justly if they do not) how poor and beggarly they are in grace, to make an improvement of that holy oil of grace, which drops from the lips and lives of their godly relations. Set your memories, consciences, hearts, and affections, as vessels to receive all the expressions of holiness that come from them; thy memory, let that keep

Digitized by Google

and retain the instructions, reproofs, comforts, drawn by them out of the word; thy conscience, that applies these to thy own soul, till from thence they distil into thy affections, and thou becomest in love more and more with holiness thy own self, from their recommendation of it to thee. It is a sad thing to consider what different use a naughty heart makes of the gifts and graces of the godly, with whom they live, as they sparkle forth, to what a humble, sincere one doth. A naughty heart does but envy and malign such a one the more, and instead of getting good, is made worse; whereas the sincere soul he labours to treasure up all for his good. When Joseph told his prophetic dream to his brethren, their envy, which before lay smothering in their breasts, took fire presently, and awhile after flamed forth into that unnatural cruelty practised upon him by them. There was all the use they made of it; but of good Jacob it is said, by way of opposition to them, Gen. xxxvii. 11: 'His brethren envied him, but his father observed the saying;' he laid it up for future use, as that which had something of God in it. Thus, Christian, do thou by the holy breathings of the spirit in those thou livest with.

Note the remarkable passages of their gracious conversations, as thou wouldst do the notions of some excellent book, which is not thine own, but lent thee for a time to peruse: indeed upon these terms, and no surer, do we enjoy our gracious friends and relations. They are but lent us for a while, and improve them, or not improve them, they will be called for ere long; and will it be for thy comfort to part with them, before thou hast had a heart to get good by them? It was a solemn speech of that reverend holy man of God, Mr. Bolton, to his children, when on his death-bed: 'I charge you, O my children, not to meet me at the great day before Christ's tribunal in a Christless, graceless condition.' God keeps an exact account of the means he affords us for our salvation, and the lives of his holy servants are not of the lowest rank. You shall observe that God is very curious in Scripture, to record the time how long his faithful servants lived on earth; and sure among other reasons, he would have us know that he means to reckon with those that lived with them, for every year, yea, day and hour they had them among them. They shall know they had a prophet, a father, husband, that were godly, and that they had them so long; and God will know of them what use they made of them.

CHAPTER X.

OF EXERCISING THE POWER OF HOLINESS IN OUR CARRIAGE TO OUR NEIGHBOURS WITHOUT DOORS.

Secondly, Thy righteousness to others must not stay within doors, but walk out into the streets, and visit thy neighbours round. Thy behaviour to, and conversation with them must be holy and righteous. In Scripture, righteousness, and living righteously, do oft import the whole duty of the Christian to his neighbour, and so stands distinguished from piety, which hath God for its immediate object; and sobriety or temperance, which immediately respects ourselves. See them altogether, Tit. ii. 12, where 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation' is said to 'teach us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.' He that would be the death of all these three, needs do no more but stab one of them, no matter which; the life of holiness will run out at any door, here or there, wherever the wound is given. It is true, indeed, there is a moral righteousness, which leaves us short of true holiness; but no true holiness that leaves us short of moral righteousness. Though the sensitive soul be found in a beast without the rational, yet the rational soul is not found in man without the sensitive. Grace and evangelical holiness being the higher principle, includes and comprehends the other within itself. This is the dignity and honour due to Christianity, and the principle it lays down in the gospel, (the enemies of it being judges,) that though some who profess it are none of the best, yet they learn not their unrighteousness of it; most true it is what one saith, No Christian can be bad, except he be a hypocrite. Either, therefore, renounce thy baptism, or abominate the thoughts of all unrighteousness; so be sure thou mightest escape better, if thou wouldst let the world know thou didst claim no kindred with Christ, before thou practisest such wickedness. Some are unresolved where to find Aristides, Socrates, Cato, and some few other heathens,

Digitized by Google

eminent for their moral righteousness, whether in heaven or hell; but were there ever any that doubted what would become of the unrighteous Christian in the other world? Hell gapes for these above all others: 'Know you not,' saith the apostle, 'that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?' 1 Cor. vi. 9; as if he had said, Sure you have not so far lost the use of your reason, to think that there is any room for such cattle as these in heaven. And if not the unrighteous, what crevice of hope is left for their salvation, whose unrighteousness hath a thousand times more malignity in it, than any others in the world is capable of? The heathen shall for their unrighteousness be indicted, as condemned as rebels to the law; so shall the unrighteous Christian also, and that more deeply. But the charge which is incomparably heaviest, and will lay weight upon him far above the other, is that which the gospel brings in, that by his unrighteousness he hath been an 'enemy to the cross of Christ,' Phil. iii. 18. Indeed, if a man had a mind to shew his despite to the height against Christ and his cross, the devil himself could not help him to express it more fully, than to clothe himself with a gaudy profession of the gospel, and with this wrapped about him, to roll himself in the kennel of sordid, base practices of unrighteousness. O how it makes the profane world blaspheme the name of Christ, and abhor the very profession of him, when they see any of this filth upon the face of their conversation, who take the name of saints to themselves more than others do! What! shall that tongue lie to man, that even now prayed so earnestly to God? Those eyes he sent on lusts, or envious errands, that a few moments past thou tookest off the Bible, from reading those sacred oracles? Those hands in thy neighbour's pocket to rob him of his estate, which were not long ago stretched forth so devoutly to heaven? Those legs carry thee to-day into thy shop or market to cheat and cozen, which yesterday thou wentest with to worship God in public?

In a word, dost thou think to commune with God, so as by a greater semblance of outward zeal to God in the first table, to obtain a dispensation, in point of righteousness, to man, in the second? Will thy pretended love to God excuse the malice and rancour with which thy heart swells against thy neighbour? thy devotion to God, disoblige thee from paying thy debts to man? God forbid thou shouldst think so, but if thou dost, Peter's counsels to Simon Magus is mine to thee, 'Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee,' Acts viii. 22. In the name of God I charge every one that wears Christ's livery to make conscience of this piece of righteousness, as you would not bring upon your heads the vengeance of God for all those blasphemies, which the nakedness of some professors in this particular, yea, base practices of some hypocrites, have given occasion to be belched out by the ungodly world against Christ and the good ways of holiness. Now, the power of holiness, as to this particular, will be preserved, when these two things are looked to:

First, When our care is uniform, and equally distributed, to endeavour the performing of one duty we owe to our neighbour as well as another. For we must know, there is a righteousness that, as one saith, runs through every precept, as it were the veins of every law, in the second table; and calls for obedience due to parents natural, civil, ecclesiastical, in the fifth command; our care to preserve our neighbour's life in the sixth, chastity in the seventh, estate in the eighth, good name in the ninth, and our desires in due bounds, against coveting what is our neighbour's, in the tenth. Now, as health in the body is preserved by keeping the passages of life open, for the spirits freely to move from one part to another, which once obstructed from doing their office in any part, the health of the body is presently in danger; so here the spirit and life of holiness is preserved in the Christian by a holy care and endeavour to keep the heart free and ready to pass from doing one duty he owes his neighbour to another, according to the several walks that are in every command for him to move in.

Secondly, as our care must be uniform, so the motive and spring within that sets us at work, and makes all these wheels move, must be evangelical. The command is a road in which both heathen, Jew, and Christian, may be found travelling; how now shall we know the Christian from the other, when heathen and Jew also walk along with him in the same duty, and seem as

Digitized by Google

dutiful children, obedient wives, loyal subjects, loving neighbours, as the Christian himself? Truly, if it be not in the motive from which, and end to which, he acts, nothing else can do it. Look, therefore, well to this, or else thou art out of the way, while thou seemest to be in the road. It is very ordinary for men to wrong Christ when they do their neighbour right; and this is done when Christ is not interested in the action, and love to him doth not move us thereunto; without this, thou mayest go for an honest heathen, but canst not be a good Christian. Suppose a servant were entrusted by his master to go and pay such a man a sum of money, which he doth, not out of any dutiful respect to the command, or love to the person of his master, but for shame of being taken for a thief; in this case the man should have his due, but his master a great deal of wrong. Such wrong do all mere civil persons do the Lord Jesus; they are very exact and righteous in their dealings with their neighbours, but very injurious, at the same time, to Christ, because they do not this upon his account. This makes love to our neighbour evangelical, and, as Christ calls it, 'a new commandment,' John xiii., when our love to our brother takes fire from his love to us. We cannot, in a gospel sense, be said to do the duty of any commandment, except we first love Christ, and then for his sake do it: 'If you love me, keep my commandments,' John xiv. 15. Where observe, that as God prefixed his name before the Decalogue, so Christ, for the same reason, doth his before the Christian's obedience to any of them, that so they may keep them both as his commandments, and out of love to him, who hath brought us out of a worse house of bondage than Egypt was to Israel.

CHAPTER XI.

CONTAINS NINE OR TEN DIRECTIONS TOWARDS THE HELPING THOSE THAT DESIRE TO MAINTAIN THE POWER OF A HOLY, RIGHTEOUS CONVERSATION.

3. The third thing propounded in handling the point calls now for our despatch; and that is, to lay down some direction by way of counsel, and to help all those that desire to maintain the power of holiness and righteousness in their daily walking.

Section I.—First, Be sure thou gettest a good foundation laid, on which may be reared the beautiful structure of a holy, righteous conversation; and that can be no less than the change of thy heart by the powerful working of God's sanctifying Spirit in thee. Thou must be righteous and holy before thou canst live righteously and holily. If the ship hath not its right make at first, be not equally poised according to the law of that art, it will never sail trim; and if the heart be not moulded anew by the workmanship of the Spirit, and fashioned according to the law of the new creature, in which 'old things pass away, and all things become new,' 2 Cor. v. 17, the creature will never walk holily. It is solid grace in the vessel of the heart that feeds profession in the lamp; holiness is in the life, Matt. xxv. 4. Now this thorough change of thy heart is especially to be looked at in these two things:

First, That there be a change made in thy judgment of, and disposition of heart to sin. Thou hast formerly had such a notion of sin as hath made it desirable; thou hast looked upon it as Eve did on the forbidden fruit; thou hast thought it 'pleasant to the eye, good for food,' and worth thy choice to be desired of thee: if thou continuest of the same mind, thy teeth will be watering, and heart continually hankering after it. Thou mayest possibly be kept from expressing and venting the inward thought of thy heart for a while; but as two lovers kept asunder by their friends will one time or other make an escape to each other, so long as their affection is the same as it was, so wilt thou to thy lust; and therefore never rest till thou canst say, thou dost as heartily loathe and hate sin as ever thou lovedst it before.

Secondly, Look that there be such a change in thy judgment and heart as makes thee take an inward complacency and delight in Christ and his holy commands. Then there is little fear of thy degenerating when thou art tied to him and his service by the heart-strings of love and complacency. The devil finds it no hard work to part him and his duty, that never joyed nor took true content in doing of it. He whose calling doth not like him, nor fit his genius, as we say, will never excel in it. A scholar learns more in a week, when he comes to

Digitized by Google

relish learning, and is pleased with its sweet taste, than he did in a month when he went to school, to please his master, whom he feared, not himself. Observe any person in the thing wherein he takes high content, and he is more careful and curious about that than any other: if his heart be on his garden, O how neatly it is kept! it shall lie, as we say, in print; all the rare roots and slips that can be got for love or money shall be sought for. Is it beauty that one delights in? how curious and nice is such a one in dressing herself; she hardly knows when she is fine enough. Truly thus it is here: a soul that truly loves Christ delights in holiness; all his strength is laid out upon them; may he but excel in this one thing, be more holy, more heavenly, he will give others leave to run before him in anything else.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Be sure to keep thy eye on the right rule thou art to walk by. Every calling hath a rule to go by peculiar to itself, which requires some study to get an insight into, without which a man will but bungle in his work. No calling hath such a sure rule and perfect law to go by as the Christian's; therefore, in earthly professions and worldly callings, men vary in their way and method, though of the same trade, because there is no such perfect rule but another may superadd to it. But the Christian hath one standing rule, the word of God, 'able to make the man of God perfect:' now, he that would excel in the power of holiness must study this. The physician, he consults with his Galen; the lawyer with his Littleton; and the philosopher with his Aristotle; the masters of these arts. How much more should the Christian with the word, so as to be determined by that, and drawn by that, more than by a whole team of arguments from men? 'We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth,' saith Paul, 2 Cor. xiii. 8. O Christian! when credit votes this way, friends and relations that way; when profit bids thee do this, and pleasure that; say, as Jehoshaphat concerning Micaiah, 'Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that I may inquire of him?' 1 Kings xxii. 7. Is there not the word of God, that I may be concluded by it, rather than by any of these lying prophets? Now, there are three ways that men go contrary to this direction, all of them destructive to the power of holiness: some walk by no rule; some by a false rule: and the third by the true rule, but partially. The first is the antinomist and libertine; the second is the superstitious zealot; the third is the hypocrite; beware of all these, except thou meanest to lay the knife to the throat of holiness.

First, Take heed thou dost not take away the rule God sets before thee with the antinomist and libertine, who say the law is not a rule to the Christian. These must needs make crooked lines in their lives, that live by rote, and not by rule. I had thought Christ had baptized the law and gospelized it, both by preaching it as a rule of holiness in his sermons, Matt. v. 27, and by walking in his life by the rule of it, 1 Pet ii. 21, 22. That principle, therefore, may be indited for a murderer of a righteous and holy life, which takes away the rule by which it should be led. This is a subtile way indeed of Satan to surprise the poor creature; if he make the Christian traveller weary of his guide, and once send him away, then it will not be long before he will wander out of heaven-way and fall into hell-roads. The apostle tells us of a generation of men who 'while they promised themselves liberty, are themselves servants of corruption,' 2 Pet. ii. 19. Truly, these, methinks, look like the men who slip off the yoke of the command under a pretence of liberty, that soon have a worse yoke on in its room, even the yoke of sin.

Secondly, Take heed thou walkest not by a false rule. There is but one true rule, the word of God; and therefore we may soon know which is a false, Isaiah viii. 20: 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. Pretend not to more strictness than the word will vouch; this is to be over-righteous indeed, Eccl. vii. 16. Excess makes a monster, as well as defect; not only he that hath but one hand, but he that hath three, is one. There is a curse scored up for him 'that adds to,' as well as for him 'that takes from the words of this book,' Rev. xxii. 18. The devil hath had of old a design to undermine scriptural holiness, by crying up an apocryphal holiness; he knows too well, that as the pot, by boiling over, puts out the fire, and so comes in a while not to boil at all; thus by making men's zeal to boil over into a false pretended holiness, he is

Digitized by Google

sure to quench all true holiness, and bring them at last to have no zeal, but prove key-cold atheists. The Pharisee he must add to the commands of God the traditions of men; the Papist, his true son and heir, hath his unwritten verities, holy orders, and rules for a more austere life than ever came into God's heart to require; and of late the Quakers have borrowed many of their shreds from both, with which they are very busy to patch up a ridiculous kind of religion, which a man cannot possibly take up, till he hath first fore-done his own understanding, and renounced all subjection to the word of God. O beware of a will-holiness, and a will-worship! It is a heavy charge God put in against Israel, Hosea viii. 14: 'Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples.' This may seem strange, forget God, and yet so devout as to build temples! Yes, she built them without warrant from God; God counts himself forgot, when we forget his word, and keep not close to that. It is laid at Jeroboam's door as a great sin, 'that he offered upon the altar which he made at Bethel, in the month which he had devised in his heart,' 1 King xii. 33. He took counsel of his own heart, not of God, when and where to offer. A holiness which is the device of our heart, is not the holiness after God's heart; the curse that falls upon such bold men is, that while they seek to establish a holiness of their own, they submit not to the true holiness God requires in his word. God justly gives them over to real unholiness, for pretending to a further holiness than they should. Witness those sinks and common shoals of all abominations, religious houses, I mean, as they are called by the Papists, which being the institutions of men, for want of the salt of a divine warrant to keep them sweet, have run into filthiness and corruption. God will not endure his creature should be a self-mover; it is a greater sin to do what we are not commanded, than not to do what we are commanded by God; as it is in a subject, to presume to make laws of his own head, than to obey the law his prince enacts. By setting up a holiness of our own, we take God's mint, as it were, out of his hand, to whom alone it belongs to stamp what is holy, and what not.

Thirdly, Use not the true rule partially. To be partial in practising is as bad as to be partial in handing of the law. This made the priests contemptible, Mal. ii. 9; and so will that the professor, to God and man. Square the whole frame of thy life by rule, or all is to no purpose: 'Divers measures are as an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. xx. 10. He is the honest man in his dealings with men, that hath but one measure, and that according to law, which he useth in his trade. And he is the holy man, that useth but one rule for all his actions, and that no other than the word of God. O how fulsome was the Jews' hypocrisy to God, that durst not go into the judgment-hall, for fear of rendering themselves unclean, John xviii., but made no scruple of imbruing their hands in Christ's blood! and the Pharisees, who observed the rule of the law strictly, in 'tithing anise and cummin,' but dispensed with themselves in the 'weightier matters of the law!' O beware of this as thou lovest thy soul's life. You would not thank that customer who comes into your shop, and buys a pennyworth of you, but steals from you what is worth a pound; or him that is very punctual in paying a small debt he owes, only that he may get deeper into your book, and at last cheat you of a greater sum. This is horrid wickedness to comply with the word in little matters, on a design that you may covertly wrong God in greater.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, Propound a right end to thyself in thy righteous, holy waking; and here be sure thou standest clear off a legal end; do not think by thy righteousness to purchase anything at God's hand. Heaven stands not upon sale to any: 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord,' Rom. vi. What God sold to Christ he gives to us. Christ was the puchaser, believers are but heirs to what he hath bought, and must claim nothing but in his right: by claiming anything of God for our righteousness, we shut ourselves out from having any benefit of his. We cannot be in two places at the same time; if we be found leaning on our own house, we cannot also be found in Christ; Paul knew this, and therefore renounceth the one, that he may be entitled to the other, Phil. iii. 8, 9. It is Satan's policy to crack the breastplate of thy own righteousness, by beating it out further than the metal will bear; indeed, by trusting in it thou destroyest the very nature of it; thy righteousness becomes unrighteousness, and

Digitized by Google

thy holiness degenerates into wickedness. What greater impiety than pride,—such a pride as lords it over Christ, and alters the method which God himself hath set for saving souls? O soul, if thou wouldst be holy, learn to be humble! They are clasped together, Micah vi. 8: 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God!' and how he that trusts in his own holiness, should be said to walk humbly, it cannot enter into our heart to conceive. God sets not thee to earn heaven by thy holiness, but thereby to shew thy love and thankfulness to Christ that hath earned it for thee. Hence the great argument Christ useth to provoke his disciples to holiness is love: 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' John xiv. As if he had said, You know what I came into the world, and am now going out of the world, for; both upon your service, for whom I lay down my life, and take it up again, that I may live in heaven to intercede for you; if these, and the blessed fruits you reap from these, be valued by you, love me; and if you love me, testify it in keeping my commandments. That is gospel holiness which is bred and fed by this love, when all the Christian doth is by him offered up as a thanksgiving-sacrifice to Christ, 'that loved us to death.' Thus the spouse to Christ, Cant. vii. 12: 'I will give thee my loves;' what she means by her loves, she expresseth, ver. 13: 'All manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved!' In ver. 10, she had professed her faith on Christ, and drunk deep of his love: and now, to rebound his love in thankfulness, she bestirs herself to entertain him with the pleasant fruits of his own graces, as gathered from a holy conversation, which she doth not lay up to feed her pride and self-confidence with, but reserves them for her beloved, that he may have the entire praise of them.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, Often look on the perfect pattern which Christ in his own example hath given thee for a holy life. Our hand will be as the copy is we write after, if we set low examples before us, it cannot be expected we should rise high ourselves; and, indeed, the holiest saint on earth is too low to be our pattern, because perfection in holiness must be aimed at by the weakest Christian, 2 Cor. vii. 1: and that is not to be found in the best of saints in this lower world. Moses, the meekest man on earth, at a time his spirit is ruffled: and Peter, the foreman of the apostles, doth not always 'foot it right,' according to the gospel, Gal. ii. 14. And he that would follow him then is sure to go out of his way. The good soldier follows his file-leader, not when he runs away, but when he marches after his captain orderly, 1 Cor. xi. 1: 'Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ." The comment must be followed no further than it agrees with the text. The master doth not only rule the scholar's book for him, but writes him a copy with his own hand. Christ's command is our rule, his life our copy; if thou wilt walk holily, thou must not only endeavour to do what Christ commands, but as Christ himself did it; thou must labour to shape every letter in thy copy, action in life, in a holy imitation of Christ. By holiness we are the very 'image of Christ,' Rom. viii. 29. We present Christ, and hold him forth to all that see us. Now two things go to make a thing the image of another: first, likeness; secondly, derivation. It must not only be like it, but this likeness must be deduced and derived from it; snow and milk are both white alike, yet we cannot say that they are the image one of another, because that likeness they have is not derived either from other. But the picture which is drawn every line by the face of a man this may properly be called the image of that man, after whose likeness it is made. Thus true holiness is that which is derived from Christ, when the soul sets Christ in his word, and Christ in his example, before him: as one would the person whose picture he intends to draw, and labours to draw every line in his life by these. O this is a sweet way indeed to maintain the power of holiness when thou art tempted to any vanity, set Christ before thy eye in his holy walking: ask thy soul, Am I in this speech, action, company I consort with, like Christ? Did he, or would he, if again to live on earth, do as I do? Would not he be more choice of his words than I am? Did ever such a vain speech drop from his lips? Would he delight in such company as I do? Spend his time upon such trifles and impertinences as I do? Would he bestow so much cost in pampering of his body, and swallow down his throat at one meal, what would feed many poor creatures ready to starve for want? Would he be in

Digitized by Google

every fashion that comes up, though ever so ridiculous and offensive? Should cards and dice ever have been found in his hands to drive time away? and shall I indulge myself in anything that would make me unlike Christ? God forbid! We think it enough if we can quote such a good man or great professor to countenance our practice, and so are led into temptation. But Christian, if thy conscience tells thee Christ likes not such doings, away with them, though thou couldst produce the example of the most eminent saint in the country to favour them. Thou knowest some, possibly, of great name for profession, that have cast off duties in their families; but did not Christ shew an especial care of the apostles which lived under him, and were of his family? often praying with them, repeating to them, and further opening what he preached in public; keeping the passover with them as his household, according to the law of that ordinance, Exod. xvi. Thou seest some turn their back on the public assemblies, under a pretence of sinful mixtures there that would defile them: did our Lord Jesus do this? Was not he in the temple, and in the synagogues, holding communion with them in the service of God, which was, for the substance, there preserved, though not without some corruptions crept in among them? O Christian, study Christ's life more, and thou wilt soon learn to mend thy own? *Summa religionis est imitari quem colis;* it is the very sum and top of religion to be as like the God we worship as may be.

Section V.—Fifthly, Walk dependingly on God. The vine is fruitful so long as it hath a pole or wall to run upon, but without such a help it would soon be trod under foot, and come to nothing. 'It is not in man to direct his own way;' *Multa bona facit Deus in homine, quæ non facit homo; nulla vero facit homo, quæ non facit Deus ut faciat,* (Augustine); there are many good things that God doth in man, which man has no hand in; but there is no good and holy action that a man does, but God does enable him to do it: as was said of that Grecian captain, 'Parmenio did many exploits without Alexander, but Alexander nothing without Parmenio.' If thou wilt, therefore, maintain holiness in its power, 'acknowledge God in all thy ways, and lean not to thine own understanding,' Prov. iii. 5, 6. He is ready to help them that engage him, but counts himself charged with the care of none but such as depend on him. The Christian's way to heaven is something like that in our nation, called the Washes, where the sands, by reason of the sea's daily overflowing, do so alter, that the traveller who passed them safely a month ago, cannot, without great danger, venture again, except he hath his guide with him; where then he found firm land, possibly a little after coming he may meet with a devouring quicksand. Truly thus the Christian who gets over a duty at one time with some facility, his way smooth and plain before him, at another time may find a temptation in the same duty enough to set him, if he had not help from heaven to carry him safe out of danger. O Christian, it is not safe for thee to venture one step without thy stay, thy hand of faith leaning on thy Beloved's arm! Trust to thy own legs and thou fallest; use thy legs, but trust to his arm, and thou art safe.

Section VI.—Sixthly, Look to thy company, who they are thou consortest with. Flee unholy company, as baneful to the power of godliness: be but as careful for thy soul, as thou wouldst for thy body; durst thou drink in the same cup, or sit in the same chair with one that hath an infectious disease? And is not sin as catching a disease as the plague itself? Darest thou come where such ill scents are to be taken, as may soon infect thy soul? Of all trades it would not do well to have the collier and fuller live together; what one cleanseth, the other will blacken and defile. Thou canst not be long among unholy ones but thou wilt hazard the defiling of thy soul, which the Holy Spirit hath made pure: and he did not wash thee clean, to run where thou shouldst be made foul. To be sure thou shalt have no help from them to advance thy holiness: and truly we would not choose that society where we may not hope to make them, or be made ourselves better by them. It is observable what the Spirit of God notes concerning Abraham, Heb. xi. 9: 'He sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise.' He is not said to dwell with the natives of that land, but 'with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise with him.' Abraham did not seek acquaintance with the heathen; no, he was willing to continue a stranger to them; but he lived with those that were of his own family, and God's family

Digitized by Google

also. Christians are a company of themselves: Acts iv. 23, 'Being let go, they went to their own company.' Who should believers join themselves to but believers? As Paul said, 'Have you not a wise man among you, but you must go to law before unbelievers?' so may I say to thee, Christian, Is there never a saint in all the town that thou canst be acquainted with, sit and discourse with, but you must join with the profane and ungodly, amongst whom you live? No wonder thy holiness thrives no better, when thou breathest in wicked company, that is like the east wind, under which nothing grows and prospers.

SECTION VII.—Seventhly, Get some Christian friend, whom thou mayest trust above others, to be thy faithful monitor. O, that man hath a great help for the maintaining the power of godliness, that as an open-hearted friend that dare speak his heart to him! A stander-by sees more sometimes by a man, than the actor can do by himself, and is more fit to judge of his actions than he of his own. Sometimes self-love blinds us in our own cause, that we see not ourselves so bad as we are; and sometimes we are over-suspicious of the worst by ourselves, which makes us appear to ourselves worse than we are. Now, that thou mayest not deprive thyself of so great a help from thy friend, be sure to keep thy heart ready with meekness to receive, yea, with thankfulness embrace, a reproof from his mouth. Those that cannot bear plain dealing hurt themselves most; for by this they seldom hear the truth. He that hath not love enough to give a reproof seasonably to his brother, nor humility enough to bear a reproof from him, is not worthy to be called a Christian: by the first he shews himself a 'hater of his brother,' Lev. xix. 17; by the second he proves himself a scorner, Prov. ix. Holy David professed he would take it as a kindness for the righteous to smite him; yea, as kindly as if he broke a box of precious oil upon his head, which was amongst the Jews a high expression of love, Psa. cxli. 5. And he made his word good; he did not, as the Papists do by their holy water, commend it highly, but turn away his face when it comes to be sprinkled on him. No, Abigail and Nathan, who reproved him, one for his bloody intention against Nabal and his family, the other for his bloody act upon Uriah, they both sped will in their errand. The first prevented the fact intended by her seasonable reproof; the second recovered him out of that dismal sin of murder wherein he had lain some months without coming so far to himself as to repent of it, for aught that we read: and, which is observable, they did not only prevail in the business, but endeared themselves, by this their faithfulness to his soul, so unto him, that he takes her to be his wife, and him to be of his most privy council to his dying day, 1 Kings i. 27—32. Truly it is one great reason why the falls of professors are so frequent in our days, and their recovery so rare or late, because few in these unloving times are to be found so faithful as to do this Christian office of reproof to their brethren; they will sooner go and tattle of it to others to their disgrace, than speak of it to themselves for their recovery. Indeed, by telling others, we obstruct our way from telling the person himself, with any hope of doing him good. It will be hard to make him believe thou comest to heal his soul, who hast already wounded his name.

SECTION VIII.—Eighthly, Be often seriously thinking how holily and righteously you will, in a dying hour, wish you had lived. They who now think it matters not much what language drivels from them, what company they walk in, what they busy their time about, how they comport with God in his worship, and with man in their dealings, but live at large, and care not much which end goes foremost; yea, wonder at the zeal and niceness of others, as if there were no pace would carry them to heaven but the gallop; when once death comes so near as to be known by its own grim face, and not by report of others, when these poor creatures see they must in earnest go into another world without any delay, and their naked souls must return to 'God that gave them,' to hear what interpretation he will put upon the course and tenour of their walking, and, accordingly, to pass an irrevocable sentence of life or death upon them; now their thoughts will begin to change, and take up other notions of a righteous and holy life than ever they had before. It is observed amongst the Papists, that many cardinals, and other great ones, who would think their cowl and religious habit ill become them in their health, yet are very ambitious to die and be buried in them, as commonly they are. Though this be a foppery

Digitized by Google

in itself, yet it helps us to a notion considerable. They who live wickedly and loosely, yet like a religious habit very well when to go into another world. As that young gallant said to his swaggering companion, after they had visited Ambrose lying in his dying bed, and saw how comfortably he lay triumphing over death now approaching, 'O that I might live with thee, and die with Ambrose!' Vain wish! wouldst thou, O man, not reap what thou sowest, and find what thou layest up with thy own hands? Dost thou sow cockle, and wouldst reap wheat? Dost thou fill thy chest with dirt, and expect to find gold when thou openest it? Cheat and gull thyself thou mayest, but thou canst not mock God, who will pay thee in the same coin, at thy death, which thou treasurest up in thy life. There are few so horribly wicked but the thought of death awes them; they dare not fall upon their wicked practices till they have got some distance from the thoughts of this. Christian, walk in the company of it every day by serious meditation, and tell me at the week's end whether it doth not keep worse company from thee.

SECTION IX.—Ninthly, Improve the covenant of grace for thy assistance in thy holy course. Moses himself had his holiness not from the law, but gospel. Those heroic acts for which he is recorded as one so eminently holy, they are all attributed to his faith: Heb. xi. 24, 25, 'By faith Moses did this,' and by faith that, to shew from whence he had his strength. Now the better to improve the covenant of grace for this purpose, consider these three particulars.

First, That God, in the covenant of grace, hath promised to furnish and enable his children for a holy life: Ezek. xxxvi. 27, 'I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.' This is a way that God hath by himself. The mother can take her child by the hand to lead it, but not put strength into his feeble joints to make him go. The prince can give his captains a commission to fight, but not courage to fight. There is a power goes with the promise, hence it is they are called 'exceeding great and precious promises,' because given for this very end, that by these we might be 'made partakers of the Divine nature,' 2 Pet. i. 3; and, therefore, we are not only pressed to holiness from the command, but especially from the promise, 2 Cor. vii. 1, 'Having therefore these promises,' (he means to help and encourage us,) 'let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' O it is good travelling in his company that promiseth to pay our charges all the way! good working for him that promiseth to 'work all our work for us,' Phil. ii. 12, 13.

Secondly, God hath laid up in Christ a rich and full treasure of grace, to supply thy wants continually: Col. i. 19, 'It pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell.' Fulness, all fulness, all fullness dwelling; not the fulness of a land-flood, up and down,—not the fulness of a vessel, to serve his own turn only, but of a fountain that lends its streams to others without straitening or lessening its own store. Indeed it is a fulness purposely ministerial, as the sun hath not its light for itself, but for the lower world, because it is the great minister and servant to hold forth light to the world. Thus Christ is the Sun of righteousness, diffusing his grace into the bosoms of his people. Grace is said to be 'poured into his lips,' to let us know he hath it not to keep to himself, but to 'impart that of his fulness we may receive grace for grace.'

Thirdly, Every child of God hath not only a right to this 'fulness in Christ,' but an inward principle, which is faith, whereby he is, by the instinct of the new creature, taught to suck and draw grace from Christ as the child doth nourishment in the womb by the navel-string from the mother; and, therefore, poor soul, if thou wouldst be more holy believe more, suck more, from Christ. Holy David, Psa. cxvi., affected with the thoughts of God's gracious providence in delivering him out of his deeper distress takes up, as the best messenger he could send his thanks to heaven by, a strong resolution for a holy life: ver. 9, 'I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living;' he would spend his days now in God's service; but lest we should think he was rash and self-confident, he adds, ver. 10, 'I believed, therefore have I spoken.' First, he acted his faith on God for strength, and then he promiseth what he will do. Indeed the Christian is a very beggarly creature considered in himself; he is not ashamed to confess it: what he promiseth to expend in any holy duty is

Digitized by Google

upon the credit of his Saviour's purse, who, he humbly believes, will bear him out in it with assisting grace.

SECTION X.—Tenthly, Fortify thyself against those discouragements by which Satan, if possible, will divert thee from thy purpose, and make thee lay aside this breastplate of righteousness and holiness as cumbersome, yea, prejudicial to thy carnal interests. Now, the better to arm thee against his assaults of this kind, I shall instance two or three great objections whereby he scares many from this holy walking, and also lend a little help to wrest these weapons out of thy enemy's hand, by preparing an answer to them against he comes.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREIN THE FIRST POLICY OR STRATAGEM OF SATAN IS DEFEATED, WHICH HE USETH TO MAKE THE CHRISTIAN THROW AWAY HIS BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AS THAT WHICH HINDERS THE PLEASURE OF HIS LIFE.

Assault 1. FIRST, Satan labours to picture a holy, righteous life with such an austere, sour face, that the creature may be out of love with it. O, saith he, if you mean to be thus precise and holy, then bid adieu to all joy! you at once deprive yourselves of all those pleasures which others pass their days so merrily in the embraces of, that are not so strait-laced in their consciences.

How true a charge this is that Satan lays upon the ways of holiness we shall now see; and truly he that desires to see the true face of holiness, in its native hue and colour, should do well not to trust Satan, or his own carnal heart, to draw its picture. I shall deal with this objection, first, by way of concession. There are some pleasures, if they may be so called, that are inconsistent with the power of holiness; whoever will take up a purpose to live righteously, he must shake hands with them, and they are of two sorts.

SECTION I.—*Ans.* 1. First, All such pleasures as are in themselves sinful; godliness will allow no such in thy embraces. And art thou not shrewdly hurt, dost think, to be denied that which would be bane to thy drink? Would any think the father cruel that should charge his child not to dare so much as taste of any ratsbane? Truly, I hope, you that have passed under the renewing work of the Spirit can call sin by another name than pleasure. I am sure saints in former times have not counted themselves tied up, but saved from such pleasures. The bondage lies in serving them, and the liberty in being saved from them, Tit. iii. 2. The apostle bemoans the time when himself and other saints were 'foolish, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures;' and he reckons it among the prime benefits they received, by the grace of the gospel, to be delivered from that vassalage, ver. 5: 'But according to his mercy he saved us;' how? not by pardoning them only, but by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' However, the devil makes poor creatures expect pleasure in sin, and promiseth them great matters of this kind, yet he goes against his conscience, and his own present sense also. He doth not find sin so pleasant a morsel to his own taste, that he should need to commend it upon this account to others. Sin's pleasure is like the pleasure which a place in the West Indies affords those that dwell in it; there grows in it most rare, luscious fruit, but these dainties are so sauced with the intolerably scorching heat of the sun by day, and the multitude of a sort of creature stinging them by night, that they can neither well eat by day, nor sleep by night, to digest their sweetmeats, which made the Spaniards call the place, 'comfits in hell.' And truly what are the pleasures of sin but such comfits in hell? There is some carnal pleasure they have, which delights a rank, sensual palate, but they are served in with the fiery wrath of God, and stinging of a guilty, restless conscience; and the fears of the one, with the anguish of the other, are able sure to melt and waste away that little joy and pleasure they bring to the sense.

Secondly, There are pleasures which are not in their own nature sinful; such are creature-comforts and delights. The sin lies, as to these, not in the using, but in the abusing of them, which is done two ways.

First, When a due measure is not kept in the use of them. He cannot live holily and righteously in this present world that lives not soberly also. Godliness will allow thee to taste of these pleasures as sauce, but not feed on them as

Digitized by Google

meat. The rich men's charge, James v. 5, runs thus: 'Ye have lived in pleasure on earth.' They lived in pleasures as if they lived for them, and could not live without them. When once this wine of creature-contents fumes up to the brain, intoxicates the man's judgment, that he begins to dote of them, and cannot think of parting with them to enjoy better, but cries, loath to depart; as those Jews in Babylon, who, beginning to thrive in that soil, were very willing to stay there, and lay their bones in Babylon, for all Jerusalem, which they were called to return unto; then truly they are pernicious to the power of holiness. Though a master doth not grudge his servant his meat and drink, yet he will not like it if, when he is to go abroad, his servant be laid up drunk, and disabled from waiting on him by his intemperance; and a drunken man is as fit to attend on his master, and do his business for him, as a Christian overcharged with the pleasures of the creature is to serve his God in any duty of godliness.

Secondly, They are sinful when not rightly timed: fruit ate out of its season is naught. We read of 'a time to embrace, and a time to forbear,' Eccles. iii. 7; there are some seasons that the power of holiness calls off, and will not allow what is lawful at another time. As, first, on the Lord's day, now all carnal creature pleasures are out of season. God calls us then to higher delights, and expects we should lay the other aside, and not put our palates out of taste with those lower pleasures, that we may the better relish his heavenly dainties, Isaiah lviii. 13: 'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thy own pleasure, nor speaking thy own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.' Mark, we can neither taste the sweetness of communion with God, nor pay the honour due to God in sanctifying his day, except we deny ourselves in our carnal delights. If a king should, at some certain times of the year, invite some of his poor subjects to sit and feast with him at his own royal table, they should exceedingly dishonour their prince, and wrong themselves, to bring their ordinary mean fare with them to court. Do glorified saints in heaven call for any of their carnal delights, or miss them, while they are taken up in heaven, praising God, and feeding on the joys that flow from the full-eyed vision of God? And doth not God make account he gives you to enjoy heaven in a figure, when he admits you the service of his holy day? Secondly, in days of solemn fasting and prayer we are then to afflict our souls; and creature-pleasures will fit that work no better than a silver lace would do a mourning suit. Thirdly, in times of public calamity in the church abroad, especially at home; and this a gracious heart cannot but count reasonable that he should deny himself, or at least tie up himself to a very short allowance in his creature-delights. When Christ in his church lies a bleeding, sympathy is a debt we owe to our fellow-saints, Christ mystical. And truly the cords of other afflictions will be little felt through our soft, downy beds, if we indulge ourselves, I mean, to a full enjoyment of our ease and carnal delights. What child that is merry and pleasant in his own house, and hath a father or mother lying at the same time in great misery at the point of death, but unknown to him, will not, when the doleful news at last comes to him, change his note, yea, mourn that he did not know it sooner, and had not rather have been weeping for, and with his dear relations in the house of mourning, than passing away his time pleasantly at home? Hitherto I have answered by concession, confessing what pleasures the power of a holy and righteous life denies and forbids, and I hope they appear to be no other than such as may, without any loss to the believer's joy, be fairly dismissed.

SECTION II.—*Ans.* Now, in the second place, I come to answer by way of negation. Though a holy, righteous life denies the Christian the pleasures aforementioned, yet it doth not deprive him of any true pleasure the creature affords; yea, so far from this, that none doth or can enjoy the sweetness of the creature like the gracious soul that walks in the power of holiness, as will appear in these two particulars.

First, The gracious person hath a more curious palate, that fits him to taste a further sweetness in, and so draw more pleasure from, any creature-enjoyment than an unholy person can do. The fly finds no honey in the same flower from

Digitized by Google

whence the bee goes laden away; nor can an unholy heart taste that sweetness which the saint doth in a creature. He hath indeed a natural fleshy palate, whereby he relisheth the gross carnal pleasure the creature affords, and that he makes his whole meal on; but a gracious heart tastes something more: all Israel drank of the rock, 'and that rock was Christ,' 1 Cor. x. 4; but did all that tested the water's natural sweetness, taste Christ in it? No, alas! they were but a few holy souls that had a spiritual palate to do this. Samson's father and mother ate of the honey out of the lion's carcass as well as Samson, and, may be, liked the taste of it for honey as well as Samson, yet he took more pleasure sure than they; he tested the sweetness of God's providence in it, that had delivered him from that very lion that now affords him this honey, Judg. xiv.

Secondly, The Christian has more true pleasure from the creature than the wicked, as it comes more refined to him than to the other. The unholy wretch sucks dregs and all: dregs of sin, and dregs of wrath, whereas the Christian's cup is not thus spiced. First, dregs of sin; the more he hath of the creature's delights given him, the more he sins with them. O it is sad to think what work they make in his naughty heart! they are but fuel for his lusts to kindle upon; away they run with their enjoyments, as the prodigal with his bags, or like hogs in shaking time; no sight is to be had of them, or thought of their return, as long as they can get anything abroad, among the delights of the world. None so prodigiously wicked as those that are fed high with carnal pleasures. They are to the ungodly as the dung and ordure is to the swine, which grows fat by lying in it; so their hearts grow gross and fat, their consciences more stupid and senseless in sin, by them; whereas the comforts and delights that God gives into a holy soul by the creature, turn to spiritual nourishment to his graces, and draw these forth into exercise, as they do the other's lust. Secondly, dregs of wrath; the Israelites had little pleasure from their dainties, when the wrath of God fell upon them, before they could get them down their throats, Psa. lxxviii. 33. The sinner's feast is no sooner served in but divine justice is preparing to send up a reckoning after it; and the fearful expectation of this cannot but spoil the taste of the other. But the gracious soul is entertained upon free cost; no troublesome thoughts need discompose his spirit, so as to break his draught, or make him spill any of the comfort of his present enjoyment from the fear of an approaching danger. All is well, the coast is clear, he may say with David, 'I will lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety,' Psa. iv. 8; God will not, all beside cannot, break his rest; as the unicorn heals the waters by dipping his horn in them, that all the beasts may drink without danger, so Christ hath healed creature enjoyments, that there is no death now in the saint's cup.

Section III.—*Ans.* Thirdly, I answer by way of affirmation. The power of holiness is so far from depriving a man of the joy and pleasure of his life, that there are incomparable delights and pleasures peculiar to the holy life which the gracious soul finds in the ways of righteousness, enjoys by itself, and no stranger intermeddles with. They lie inward, indeed, and therefore the world speaks so wildly and ignorantly concerning them. They will not believe they have such pleasures till they see them; and they shall never see them till they believe them. The Roman soldiers, when they entered the temple, and went into the holy of holies, seeing there no image, as they used to have in their own idolatrous temples, gave out in a jeer, that the Jews worshipped the clouds. Truly thus, because the pleasures of righteousness and holiness are not so gross, as to come under the cognizance of the world's carnal senses, as their brutish ones do, therefore they laugh at the saints, as if their joy were but the child of fancy, and that they do but embrace the cloud instead of Juno herself, a fantastic pleasure for the true. But let such know that they carry in their own bosom, what will help them to think the pleasures of holy life more real than thus. The horror, I mean, which the guilt of their unholy and unrighteous lives does sometimes fill their amazed consciences with, though there be no whip on their back, and pain in their flesh, tells them that the peace which results from a good conscience may as well fill the soul with sweet joy, when no carnal delights contribute to the same. There are three things considered in the nature of a holy, righteous life, that are enough to demon-

Digitized by Google

strate it to be the only pleasant life. It is a life from God; it is a life with God; it is the very life of God.

First, It is a life from God, and, therefore, must needs be pleasant and joyous. Whatever God makes is good and pleasant in its kind. Now life is one of the choicest of God's works, insomuch that the poorest, silliest gnat or fly, in this respect, exceeds the sun in its meridian glory. To every life God hath appointed a pleasure suitable to its kind; the beasts have a pleasure suitable to the life of beasts, and man much more to his. Now every creature, we know, enjoys the pleasure of ifs life best, when it is in its right temper: if a beast be sick, it droops and groans, and so does man also; no dainties, sports, or music, please a man that is ill in his health. Now holiness is the due temper of the soul, as health is of the body; and, therefore, a holy life must needs be a pleasant life. Adam, I hope, in Paradise, before sin spoiled his temper, lived a pleasant life. When the creature is made holy, then he begins to return to his primitive temper, and with it to his primitive joy and pleasure. O sirs, men fall out with their outward conditions, and are discontented at their rank and place in the world! but the fault lies more inward! the shoe is straight and good enough, but the foot is crooked that wears it; all would do well if thou wert well, and thou wilt never be well till thou art righteous and holy.

Secondly, It is a life with God. A gracious soul walks in God's presence, and keeps communion with him. If you would meet a saint, you know his haunt, what company he keeps, 1 John i. 3: 'That ye may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.' See the ingenuity of a holy soul; truly our fellowship is with God, we tell you no lie. An unholy heart dares not be thus free, I warrant you, and tell what company his soul walks with from day to day. We see there is no danger of going among holy men, they will bring you acquainted with no ill company; they will carry you to God, where their great resort lies. And tell me now, must not that man live a pleasant life that walks with God? Let it be but a man you ride with in a journey, one that loves you well, and is able to entertain you with good and cheerful discourse; doth not the delight you take in his company, strangely, yet sweetly, beguile you of the tediousness of the way? O what joy then must God bring with him to that soul he walks with! 'Blessed is the people,' saith the psalmist, 'that know that joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day!' The sound of the trumpet which called them to their religious assemblies is called the joyful sound, because in his worship God did especially manifest himself to his people. The heaven of heavens is to be where the Lord is; surely, then, that which the saint hath of God's presence here is enough to make the Christian's life joyous. O Christian, is it not sweet to walk with God to God? To walk with God here below, by his assisting, comforting presence, to God manifesting himself in all his glory above in heaven? O all you that are for pleasant prospects in your walks, and out of your windows, see here one that the world cannot match—the prospect that a gracious soul hath, walking in the paths of righteousness: he may see God walking with him, as a friend with his friend, and manifesting himself to him, Psa. l. 23; yea, he hath not only the sweetness of God's present company with him, but he hath the goodly prospect of heaven before him, whither God is leading him, and in this way of holiness will certainly bring him at last. Whereas the unholy wretch, walking in the company of his lusts, though they sweeten his mouth with a little frothy pleasure at present, that soon is melted off his tongue, and the taste forgotten, yet they shew him the region of darkness before him, whither they will bring him, and where they will leave him, to repent of his dear-bought pleasures in torments easeless and endless.

Thirdly, It is the life of God himself. Read the expression, Eph. iv. 18, 'alienated from the life of God;' that is, the life of godliness. A holy life is the life of God. But how? Not only as God is the Author of it, so he is of the beast's life; thus the wicked are not alienated from the life of God, for they have a natural life which God gave them; but the expression carries more in it, and that is this: 'The life of God,' is as much as 'a life like the life which God himself lives.' He is a living God, and his life is a holy life; holiness is the life of his life. Now I pray, friends, do you not think God himself lives a

Digitized by Google

life of pleasure? and what is the pleasure of his life but holiness? He takes pleasure in the graces of his saints, Psalm cxlix. 4; how much more in his own essential holiness, from whence those beams which shine so beautifully to his eye in his children were at first shot! Thou, whoever thou art, hast an art above God himself, if thou canst fetch any true pleasure out of unholiness and unrighteousness; and let me tell thee also, it is not the lowest of blasphemies for thee to charge the way of righteousness and holiness to be an enemy to true pleasure; for in that thou chargest God himself to want true joy and pleasure, who has no pleasure if holiness will not yield it. But away with such putrid stuff as this is. The devils and damned souls themselves, that hate God with the most perfect hatred of any other, yet they dare not say, they cannot say so. They know God to be glorious and happy, yea, glorious in holiness; and the creature's bliss and glory to consist in a participation of that holiness, which makes God himself so blessed and glorious. This, Christian, is the utmost that can be said of thy happiness, either here, or in heaven hereafter. That makes thee glorious which makes God glorious; thy joy and pleasure is of the same kind with the pleasure God delights himself in, Psalm xxvi. 8: 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.' Mark that phrase, 'the river of thy pleasures.' God hath his pleasures, and God gives his saints to drink of his pleasures. This is the sweet accent of the saint's pleasures. When a prince bids his servants carry such a man down into the cellar, and let him drink of their beer or wine, this is a kindness from so great a personage to be valued highly. But for the prince to set him at his own table, and let him drink of his own wine, this, I hope, is far more. When God gives a man estate, corn, and wine, and oil, the comforts of the creature, he entertains the man but in the common cellar; such as have none but carnal enjoyments, they do but sit with the servants, and in some sensual pleasures they are but fellow-commoners with the beasts. But when he bestows his grace, beautifies a soul with holiness, now he prefers the creature as high as it is capable of, he never sends this rich clothing to any but he means to set such by him at his own table, with him, in heaven's glory.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEREIN IS DEFEATED SATAN'S SECOND WILE, BY WHICH HE WOULD CHEAT THE CHRISTIAN OF HIS BREASTPLATE, PRESENTING IT AS PREJUDICAL TO HIS WORDLY PROFITS.

Assault 2. SECONDLY, If thou dost not stumble at this stone, the devil hath another at hand to throw in the way. He is not so unskilful a fowler as to go with one single shot into the field; and, therefore, expect him, as soon as he hath discharged one, and missed thee, to let fly at thee with a second; and tell thee, this holy life, and righteous walking, thou hadst best never meddle with it, except thou meanest to undo thyself, and all that depend on thee. Look upon the rich, will he say, and great men in the world; how dost think these heaped together such vast estates, and raised their families to such dignity and grandeur in their places? Was it by their righteousness and holiness! Alas! if they had been so strait-laced in their consciences as thou must be, if thou tiest thyself up to the rules of a holy life, they had never come to so good a market for this world as they have done. And if thou wilt thrive with them, thou must do as they have done, through off the 'breastplate of righteousness' quite, or unbuckle it, that it may hang loose enough to turn aside when an advantage is offered, or else you may shut up your shop-windows, and give over your trade, for all you are like to get at the year's end.

Ans. To defend thee, Christian, against this assault, take these considerations, from which it will not be hard to draw an answer that will stop the mouth of this objection.

First Consider it is not necessary that thou shouldst be rich; but it is necessary thou shouldst be holy, if thou meanest to be happy. You may travel to heaven with never a penny in your purse, but not without holiness in your heart and life also. And wisdom bids thee first attend to that which is of greatest necessity.

Secondly, Heaven is worth the having, though thou goest poor and ragged,

Digitized by Google

yea, naked, thither. There are some in the world that will accept God's offer thankfully, may they be admitted into that glorious city, though God doth not bribe them, and allure thither with great estates here. And, therefore, for shame, resolve to be holy at all peradventures. Do not stand indenting with God for that, which if you were actually possessed of and loved him, you would leave, and throw at your heels with scorn, rather than part with him.

Thirdly, A little of the world will give thee content, if holiness be kept in its power, as few clothes will serve a hale, strong man: and better is the warmth that comes from blood and spirits within, than a load of clothes without. Better, I trow, the content which godliness gives the Christian in his poverty, than the content, if there be such a thing in the world, which the rich man hath from his wealth: 'Godliness with content is great gain.' The holy person is the only contented man in the world. Paul tells us, 'he had learnt in whatsoever state he was to be content,' Phil. iv. 11; but if you ask him, who was his master that taught him this hard lesson, he will tell you, he had it not by sitting at Gamaliel's feet, but Christ's, ver. 13: 'I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.' What the philosopher said in a brag, that the holy soul in truth and soberness can say through Christ, when he is lowest and poorest, that his heart and his condition are matches. We would count him a happy man, *stilo mundi*, that can live of himself without trading or borrowing, or that when he would buy or purchase, hath ready cash for the purpose in his coffers; when he would indulge his fanciful appetite with varieties, hath all within his own pale, what rarities the several elements can afford, and needs not to send abroad to this market and that for provision. Godliness is so rich a continent, that it is able to maintain the Christian of its own growth, as I may say, and out of its own store, with all that his gracious heart can desire, without begging at the creature's door, and hazarding unworthily his holiness to attain.

Fourthly, Consider what a dear bargain they have, who part with, or pawn their 'breastplate of righteousness' for the world's riches; which will appear, first, in the sin; secondly, in the heavy curse that treads upon the heels of that sin.

First, It is a great sin. The devil sure would tempt Christ to no small sin: we find him, Luke iv., laying this golden bait before him, when he 'shewed him all the kingdoms of the world,' and promised them all unto him, if he would 'fall down and worship him.' What was the foul spirit's design in this demand but to draw Christ to acknowledge him the lord of the world, and by worshipping him, to declare that he expected the good things of the world, not from God, but him? Now truly, every one that by unrighteousness seeks the world's pelf, he goes to the devil for it, and doth worship him in effect. He had as good speak out, and say he acknowledges not God, but the devil, to be lord of the world, and to have the disposing of it; for he doth what God interprets so. Now, how much better is it to have poverty from God than riches from the devil! Here is a daring sin, with a witness, at one clap, to take away God's sovereignity, and bestow it upon the devil, to do what he pleaseth with the world.

Secondly, It is a foolish sin, 1 Tim. vi. 9: 'They that will be rich,' that is by right or wrong, 'fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish lusts.' What greater folly than to play the thief to acquire that which is a man's own already! if thou art a saint, all is thine the world hath: 'Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,' 1 Tim. iv. 8. If riches be good for thee, thou shalt have it, for that is the tenour of temporal promises: and if it be not thought good by God, who is best able to judge, to pay thee the promise in specie, in kind, then another promise comes in for thy relief, which assures thee thou shall have money worth, Heb. xiii. 5: 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' If God hath given thee riches, but calls thee to part with it for his name's sake, then he gives thee his bond, upon which thou mayest recover thy loss, with a hundredfold advantage 'in this life,' besides 'eternal life in the world to come,' Matt. xix. 29. And he is a fool, with a witness, that parts with God's promises for any security the devil can give him.

Thirdly, Unrighteous gain will appear to be a dear bargain from the heavy

Digitized by Google

curse that cleaves unto it. 'The curse of God is in the house of the wicked,' Prov. iii. 33; 'but in the house of the righteous there is much treasure,' Prov. xv. 6. You may come to the righteous man, and find, possibly, no money in his house, but you are sure to find a treasure; whereas there is no treasure in the wicked man's house, when much gold and silver is to be found, because the curse of God eats up all his gains. God's fork follows the wicked's rake. It is most righteous for him to scatter what such gather by unrighteousness. They are said, therefore, to 'consult shame to their house, for the stone out of the wall shall cry, and the beam out of the house shall answer it,' Hab. ii. 10. O who that prizeth the comfort of his life would, though for tons of gold, live in a house thus haunted! where the cry of his unrighteousness follows him into every room he goes, and he doth, as it were, hear the stones and beams of his house groaning under the weight of his sin, that laid them there; yea, so hateful is this sin to the righteous Lord, that not only they who purse up the gain thus got are cursed by him, but also the instruments such use to advance their unrighteous projects. The poor servant, that, currying favour with his master, advanceth his estate by fraud and unrighteousness, God threatens to pay him his wages, Zeph. i. 9: 'I will punish those that leap on the threshold, which fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.' This is spoke either of servants standing at the door to hook in customers they may cheat; or else of great men's officers that came with absolute power into men's houses to take by violence from them what they pleased: these, though their masters pocketed up the gain, shall be punished; their masters, as the great devourers, and they as their sharks to seek and provide prey for them.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN IS DEFEATED THE THIRD STRATAGEM SATAN USETH TO DISARM THE CHRISTIAN OF HIS BREASTPLATE, AND THAT IS BY SCARING HIM WITH THE CONTRADICTION, OPPOSITION, AND FEUD FROM THE WORLD IT BRINGS.

Assault 3. THIRDLY, There is yet a third stumbling-block, which Satan useth to lay in the way of a soul setting forth in this path of righteousness; and that is the contradiction which such a one is sure to meet with from the world O, saith Satan, this is the ready way to bring thee under the lash of every tongue! to lose the love of thy neighbours, and contract the scorn, yea, hatred, of all thou livest among; and dost thou not desire to live friendly and peaceably with thy neighbours? Canst thou bear to be hooted at, as Lot was among the Sodomites, and Noah amidst the old world, that were all of another way? This holiness breeds ill blood wherever it comes; own that, and you bring the world's fists about your ears presently.

Ans. Truly though this be a sorry, weak objection in itself, yet, where it meets with a soft temper, and disposition tendered with a facility of nature, one in whom love and peaceful inclinations are predominant, it carries weight enough to amount to a dangerous temptation. No doubt Aaron stumbled at this stone in the business of the golden calf. He did not please himself, surely, in the thing: but it was an act merely complacential to the people, as appears by his apology to Moses, Exod. xxxii. 22: 'Let not the anger of my lord wax hot; thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief.' As if he had said, I did not know what they would have done to me upon my denial; what I did was to pacify them, and prevent more trouble from them. There is need we see to be armed against this temptation, which that thou mayest be, seriously weigh these two particulars:

First, Thy God, Christian, whom thou servest, commands the tongues, hands, yea, hearts, of all men. He can, when he pleases, without the least abating in thy holy course, give thee to find favour in the eyes of those thou most fearest, Prov. xvi. 7: 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.' Laban in a fury pursues Jacob, but God meets him in the way, and gives him his lesson, how he should carry himself to the good man, Gen. xxxi. 24, and ver. 29; he doth ingenuously confess to Jacob what turned the wind into a warmer corner, and made him so calm with him, that set out so full of rage, ver. 29: 'It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt, but the God of your father met me yesternight,' &c. Thank him for

Digitized by Google

nothing; he had power to hurt Jacob, but God would not let him. Mordecai, one would have thought, took the readiest way to incur the king's wrath, by denying Haman that reverence which all were, by royal command, to pay him: but the holy man's conscience would not suffer his knee to bow; and yet we see when that proud favourite had done his worst to be revenged on him, he was forced himself to inherit the gallows intended for Mordecai, and leave Mordecai to succeed him in the prince's favour. Thus God, who hath a key to king's breasts, on a sudden locked Ahasuerus's heart against that cursed Amalekite, and opened it to let this holy man into his room. O who would be afraid to be conscientious, when God can and doth so admirably provide for his people's safety, while they keep close to him!

Secondly, Suppose thy holy walking stirs up the wrath of ungodly ones against thee; know, there may be more mercy in their hatred, than in their love. Commonly, the saints get good by the wrath of the wicked against them, not so oft by their favour and friendship; their displeasure awakens their care, and makes them more accurate; thus David prayed God 'to make his way plain for him,' because of his observing enemies: whereas their friendship too oft lays it asleep, and proves a snare to draw them into some sinful compliance with them. Jehoshaphat was wound in too far by his correspondence with Ahab: so hard is it to keep in with God, and wicked men also. Luther professed 'he would not have Erasmus's honour for a world;' indeed the friendship he had with, and respect he had from the great ones of the world, made him mealy-mouthed in the cause of God. The Moabites could not give Israel the fall at arms' length; but when they closed in alliances with the children of Israel, then they were too hard for them; not their curses, but their embraces did them the hurt. Again, we can never lose the love, or incur the wrath of men, upon better or more advantageous terms, than for keeping our 'breastplate of righteousness' close to us. First, when we lose for this any love from men, we gain God's blessing instead of it: 'Blessed are ye when all men speak evil of you falsely for my name's sake,' Matt. v. 11. God's blessing is a good roof over our head, to defend us from the storm of man's wrath. O it is sad, when a Christian opens the mouths of the wicked, by some unholy action, to speak evil of him! no promise will open then its door to hide thee from the storm of their railing tongues; man reviles, and God frowns; little welcome such a one has, when he returns home to look into his own conscience, or converse with his God. But when it is for thy holiness they hate thee, God is bound by promise to pay thee love for their hatred, blessing for their cursing; and truly that courtier has little cause to complain, that for a little disrespect from others, that cannot hurt him, is advanced higher in his prince's favour. Secondly, while thy holy walking loseth thee some love from the world, it gains thee the more reverence and honour. They that will not love thee because thou art holy, cannot choose but fear and reverence thee at the same time for what they hate thee. Let a saint comply with the wicked, and remit a little of his holiness to correspond with them, he loses by the hand, as to his interest, I mean, in them; for by gaining a little false love, he loses that true honour, which inwardly their consciences paid to his holiness. A Christian walking in the power of holiness, is like Samson in his strength, the wicked fear him; but when he shews an impotent spirit by any indecency in his course to his holy profession, then presently he is taken prisoner by them, and falls under both the lash of their tongue, and scorn of their hearts. They can now dance about such a one, and make him their May game, whose holiness even now kept them in awe. It is not poverty, or the baseness of thy outward state in the world, will render thee contemptible, so long as thou keepest thy 'breastplate of righteousness' on. There sits majesty in the brow of holiness, though clad in rags. Righteous David commands reverence from wicked Saul. The king himself does this homage to his poor exiled subject, 1 Sam. xxiv. 17: "He wept, and said to David, Thou art more righteous than I.' Ay, this is as it should be, when carnal men are forced to acknowledge that they are outshot by the holy lives of Christians. O Christians, do some singular thing, what the best of your merely civil neighbours cannot do, and you sit sure in the throne of their consciences, even when they throw you out of their hearts and affections. So long as the magicians did something like the miracles Moses wrought,

Digitized by Google

they thought themselves as good men as he; but when they were nonplused in the 'plague of lice,' and could not, with all their art, produce the like, they acknowledged the 'finger of God to be in it,' Exod. viii. 16. Do no more than carnal men do, and you stand but level with themselves in their opinions of you, yea, they think themselves better than you, because they equal you, who pretend to holiness more than they. It is expected that every one in the calling he professeth should more than a little exceed another that is not of that calling, which, if he do not, he becomes contemptible.

CHAPTER XV.

CONTAINS TWO USES OF THE POINT.

We come to the application, in which we shall be the shorter, having sprinkled something of this nature all along as we handled the doctrinal part.

Section I.—*Use* 1. First, For information in two particulars.

First, Are we thus to endeavour the maintaining of the power of holiness, then, sure, there is such a thing as righteousness and unrighteousness, holiness and sin that opposeth it: yet there is a generation of men that make these things to be mere fancies, as if all the existence they had were in the melancholy imaginations of some poor-spirited, timorous men, who dream of these things, and then are scared with the bugbears that their own foolish thoughts represent to them. Hence some among us have dared to make it their boast and glorying that they have at last got from under the bondage of that tyrant, conscience; they can now do that which we call swearing, lying, yea, what not? without being bearded and checked by an imperious conscience; yea, that there is no sin to any but him that thinks so. These are worse fools than he the psalmist speaks of, Psa. xiv. 1: he doth but 'say in his heart, There is no God;' but these tell the world what fools they are, and cannot hide their shame. I do not mention these so much to confute them, that were to as little purpose as to go to prove there is a sun shining in a clear day, because a mad, frantic man denies it, but rather to affect your hearts with the abominations of the times, ye holy ones of God! O how deep asleep were men, that the enemy could come and sow such tares as these amongst us! Perhaps they thought such poisonous seed would not grow on our soil, that hath had so much labour and cost bestowed on it by Christ's husbandmen; that such strong delusions would never go down with any that had been used to so pure a gospel diet. But, alas! we see by woful experience that as a plague, when it hits into a city that stands in the purest air, often rages more than in another place, so when a spirit of delusion falls upon a people that have enjoyed most of the gospel, it grows most prodigious. It makes me even tremble to think what a place of nettles England, that hath so long continued without wrong to any other church Christ hath in the world, one of his fairest, most fruitful garden-plots, may at last become, when I see what weeds have sprung up in our days. I have heard that reverend and holy master Greenham should say, he feared rather atheism than popery would be England's ruin. Had he lived in our dismal days, he would have had his fears much increased. Were there ever more atheists made and making in England, since it was acquainted with the gospel, than in the compass of the last dozen years? I have reason to think there were not. When men shall fall so far from the profession of the gospel, and be so blinded that they cannot know light from darkness, righteousness from unrighteousness, are they not far gone in atheism? This is not natural blindness; for the heathen could tell when they did good and evil, and see holiness from sin, without Scripture light to shew them, Rom. ii. 14, 15. No, this blindness is a plague of God falling on them for rebelling against the light when they could see it. And if this plague should grow more common, which God forbid, woe then to England.

Secondly, If we be to maintain the power of holiness, then surely it is not impossible. God would not command what he doth not enable his own peculiar people to do, only here you must remember carefully the distinction, premised in the opening of the text, between a legal righteousness and an evangelical righteousness; the latter of which is so far from being unattainable, that there is not a sincere Christian in the world but is truly holy in this sense; that is,

Digitized by Google

he doth truly desire, conscionably endeavour (with some success of his endeavour, through divine grace assisting,) to walk according to the rule of God's word. I confess all Christ's scholars are not of the same form; all his children are not of the same stature and strength; some foot it more nimbly in the ways of holiness than others, yet not a saint but is endued with a principle of life, that sets him at work for God, and to desire to do more than he is able. As the seed, though little in itself, yet hath in it virtually the bigness and heighth of a grown tree, towards which it is putting forth with more and more strength of nature as it grows; so in the very first principle of grace planted at conversion, there is perfection of grace contained, in a sense, that is, a disposition putting the creature forth in desires and endeavours after that perfection to which God hath appointed him in Christ Jesus. And therefore, Christian, whenever such thoughts of the impossibility of obtaining this holiness here on earth are suggested to thee, reject them as sent in from Satan; and that on a design to feed thy own distrustful humour, which he knows they will suit too well, as the news of giants and high walls that the spies brought to the unbelieving Israelites did them, and all to weaken thy endeavours after holiness, which he knows will surely prove him a liar. Do but strongly resolve to be conscientious in thy endeavours, with an eye upon the promise of help, and the work will go on thou needest not fear it: 'for the Lord God is a sun and a shield: he will give grace and glory, and no good thing shall he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Psa. lxxxiv. 11. Mark that, 'grace and glory,' that is, grace unto glory: he will still be adding more grace to that thou hast, till thy grace on earth commenceth glory in heaven.

Section II.—*Use* 2. Secondly, For reproof of several sorts of persons.

First, All those who content themselves with their unholy state wherein they are; such is the state of every one by nature. These, alas! are so far from maintaining the power of holiness, that they are under the power of their lust; they give law to them, and cut out all their work for them, which they bestow all their time to make up. And is not that a sad life, sirs, which is spent about such filthy, beastly work as sin and unrighteousness? Well may the 'bond of iniquity and the gall of bitterness' be joined together, Acts viii. 23. The apostle is thought to allude to Deut. xxix. 18, where all sin and unrighteousness is called 'a root that beareth gall and wormwood.' He that plants sin and unholiness, and then thinks to gain any other than bitter fruit for his labour, pretends to a knowledge beyond God himself, who tells, that the natural fruit which grows from this root is 'gall and wormwood.' Who would look for musk in a dog's kennel? That thou mayest sooner find there than any true sweetness and comfort in unholiness. The devil may possibly for a time sophisticate, with his cookery and art, this bitter morsel, so that thou shalt not have the natural taste of it upon thy palate; but, as Abner said to Joab, 2 Sam. ii. 26, 'Knowest thou not it will be bitterness in the latter end?' In hell all the sugar will be melted wherein this bitter pill was wrapped; then, if not before, thou wilt have the true relish of that which goes down now so sweetly. O how many are there now in hell cursing their feast, and feast-maker too! Do you think it gives any ease to the damned to think what they had for their money? I mean what pleasures, profits, and carnal enjoyments they once had on earth, for which they now pay those unspeakable torments that are open upon them, and shall continue for ever without any hope or help. No, it increaseth their pain beyond all our conceit, that they should sell their precious souls so cheap, in a manner for a song, and lose heaven and blessedness, because they would not be holy, which now they learn, too late, was itself, however they once thought otherwise, a great part of that blessedness, and now torments them to consider they put it from them under the notion of a burden and a bondage. But, alas! alas! how few thoughts do unholy wretches spend with themselves, in considering what is doing in another world! They see sinners die daily in the prosecution of their lusts, but do no more think what is become of them, that they are in hell burning and roaring for their sin, than the fish in the river do think what is become of their fellows that were caught up by their gills from them, even now with the angler's hook, and cast into the seething-pot or frying-pan alive. No, as those silly creatures are ready still to nibble and bite at the same hook that struck their fellows, even so are men and women forward to catch at those

Digitized by Google

baits still of sinful pleasure, and wages of unrighteousness, by which so many millions of souls before them have been hooked into hell and damnation.

Secondly, Those who are as unholy as others, naked to God's eye, and Satan's malice; but to save their credit in the world, wear something like a breastplate, a counterfeit holiness, which does them this service for the present, they are thought to be what they are not: 'verily they have their reward,' and a poor one it is. Consider what you do, and tremble at it; you do the devil, God's great enemy, double service, and God double disservice; as he that comes into the field, and brings deceitful arms with him, draws his prince's expectation towards him as one who would do some exploit for him, but means nothing of the kind, yea, hinders some others that would be faithful to his prince in that place where he a traitor now stands; such a one may do his prince more mischief than many who cowardly stay at home or rebelliously run over to the enemy's side, and tell him plainly what they intend to do. O friends, be serious; if you will trade for holiness, let it be for true holiness, as it is called: Eph. iv. 34, 'Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:' wherein two phrases are observable; it is called the 'new man after God,' that is, according to the likeness of God; such a sculpture on the soul, or image, is drawn after God, as the picture after the face of the man. Again, 'true holiness,' or holiness of truth, either respecting the word, which is the rule of holiness, and then it means a Scripture holiness, not Pharisaical and traditional; or else it respects the heart, which is the seat of truth or falsehood. True holiness in this sense is holiness and righteousness in the heart; there must be truth of holiness in the inner parts; many a man's beauty of holiness is but like the beauty of his body, skin deep, all on the outside. Open the most beautiful body, and that which was so fair without will be found within, when open, to have little beside blood, filth, and stench; so this counterfeit holiness, when unbowelled, and inside exposed to view, will appear to have hid within it nothing but an abundance of spiritual impurities and abominations. 'God,' said Paul to the high priest, 'shall smite thee, thou whited wall,' Acts xxiii. 3. Thus say I to thee, O hypocrite, God shall so smite thee, thou whited wall, or rather painted sepulchre, that thy paint without in thy profession doth not now more dazzle the eyes of others into admiration of thy sanctity, than thy rottenness within, which then shall appear without, will make thee abhorred and loathed of all that see thee.

Thirdly, Those who are so far from being holy themselves, that they mock and jeer others for being so. This 'breastplate of righteousness' is of so base an account with them, that they who wear it in their daily conversation do make themselves no less ridiculous to them than if they came forth in a fool's coat, or were clad in a dress contrived on purpose to move laughter. When some wretch would set a saint most at naught, and represent him as an object of great scorn, what is the language he wraps him up in but, 'There goes a holy brother, one of the pure ones?' His very holiness is that which he thinks to disgrace him with. This shows a heart extremely wicked: there is a further degree of wickedness appears in mocking holiness in another, than harbouring unholiness in a man's own bosom. That man hath a great antipathy indeed against a dish of meat, who not only himself refuseth to eat of it, but cannot bear the sight of it on another's trencher without vomiting. O how desperately wicked is that man with whom the very scent and sight of holiness at such a distance works so strange an effect as to make him cast up the gall and bitterness of his spirit against it! The Spirit of God bestows the chair upon this sort of sinners, and sets them above all their brethren in iniquity, as most deserving the place. 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful,' Psa. i. 1. The scorner here is set as chairman at the counsel-table of sinners; some read the word for scornful, rhetorical mockers. There is indeed a devilish wit that some shew in their mock at holiness: they take a kind of pride in polishing those darts which they shoot against saints. The Septuagint reads it, 'the chair of pestilent ones.' Indeed, as the plague is the most mortal among diseases, so is the spirit of scorning among sinners; as few recover out of this sin as any whatever besides. The Scripture speaks of this sort of sinners as almost free among the dead; as little hope of doing them good for their souls as of those for their bodies who cannot

Digitized by Google

keep the physic administered to them, but presently cast it up before it hath any operation on them; and therefore we are even bid to save our physic, and not so much as bestow a reproof on them, lest we have it cast in our faces: 'Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee,' Prov. ix. 7. All we can do is, to write upon their door, 'Lord have mercy upon him!' I mean, rather pray for them than speak to them. There hath of old been this sort of sinners mingled amongst the godly. A mocking Ishmael in Abraham's family, Gen. xxi. 9. And observable it is what interpretation the Spirit of God makes of his scornful carriage towards his brother: Gal. iv. 29, 'As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.' Pray mark, first, what was the ground of the quarrel; it was this,—his brother was 'born after the Spirit;' and this he, being 'born after the flesh,' hated. Secondly, observe how the Spirit of God phraseth this his scornful carriage to his brother; it is called persecuting him.

To aggravate the evil of a scornful spirit and a mocking tongue, which stands for so little a sin in the world's account-book, (who count none persecutors but those that shed blood for religion,) God would have the jeerer and scoffer to know among what sort of men he shall be ranked and tried at Christ's bar—no less sinners than persecutors. But this I conceive is not all: this mocking of holiness is called persecuting, because there is the seed of bloody persecution in it. They who are so free of their tongue to jeer, and show their teeth in mocking at holiness, would fasten their teeth also on it if they had power to use their cheek-bone. Lastly, observe this was not barely the cross disposition of Ishmael's personal peevish and froward temper, so to abuse his brother, but it is laid as the charge of all wicked men; as he did persecute his brother because after the Spirit, even so now this mocking spirit runs in the blood, the whole litter are alike; and if any seem more ingenuous and favourable to the holy ones of God, we must fetch the reason from some other head than their sinful nature; God rides some of them with a curb-bit, who though they open not their hearts to Christ savingly, yet truth is got so far into them by a powerful conviction, that it makes conscience say to them concerning their holy neighbours, what Pilate's wife by message, said to her husband of Christ 'Have thou nothing to do with these just men, for I have suffered much concerning them,' Matt. xxvii. 19. But though there were ever mockers of holiness among the saints, because there were ever wicked neighbours; yet the Spirit of God prophesieth of a sort of mockers to come upon the stage in the last days that should differ from the ordinary scoffers that the people of God have been exercised with. And still the last is the worst; you know, those who mock and jeer at holiness use to be men and women that pretend nothing to religion themselves, such as walk in an open defiance of God, and wallow in all manner of wickedness; but the Spirit of God tells us of a new gang that shall mock at holiness under the colour of holiness: they shall be horribly wicked, some of them, as the worst of the former sort were, but wicked in a mystery: Jude ver. 17, 18, 'But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.' But mark, lest we should expect them at the wrong door, and so mistake, thinking they should arise, as formerly, from among the common swearers, drunkards, and other notorious sinners among us, he in the next word gives you as clear a character of them as if they carried their name on their forehead: ver. 19, 'These be they who separate themselves, sensual, not having the Spirit.' Learned Mr. Perkins reads the words thus: 'These be sect-makers, fleshly, not having the Spirit.' Sect-makers! those that separate themselves.' Do not our hearts tremble to see the mockers' arrows shot out at this window? These are they who pretend more to purity of worship than others, and profess they separate on conscience' account, because they cannot suffer themselves so much as to touch them that are unclean by joining with them in holy ordinances: and they mockers, they fleshly! Truly, if the Spirit of God had not told us this, we should have gone last into their tent, (as Laban did into Rachel's,) as least suspecting that any mocker of holiness could stay there; yea, God forbid that we should lay it in general as the charge of all who have separated from communion in the public, many of whom my conscience tells me are lovers of

Digitized by Google

holiness, and led, though out of their way, by the tenderness of their consciences which when God had better enlightened, will bring them as fast back to their brethren, as now it carrieth them from them. And truly, I think it might give a great lift to the making them think of a return, if they would but in their sad and serious thoughts consider how far many of those who went out from us with them are gone; even to mock at the holiness of those from whom once they parted, because they were not holy enough for their company. God, the searcher of hearts, knows I speak this with a sad heart; so that were they to come and join with us again in some ordinances, such scandal hath been given by them, that they who durst not join with us, ought not, as they are, to be admitted by us. How many of those have you heard of, that began with a separation from our assemblies, who mock at sabbaths, cast off family duties, indeed all prayer in secret by themselves, yea, drink in those cursed opinions, that make them speak scornfully of Christ the Son of God himself, and the great truths of the gospel, which are the foundation of all true holiness; so that now none are so great an object of their scorn, as those who walk most closely by the holy rule of the gospel! Well, of what sort soever you are whether athiestical mockers at holiness, or such as mock true holiness in the disguise of a false one, take heed what you do—it is as much as your life is worth: 'Be not deceived, God will not be mocked,' nor suffer his grace to be mocked in his saints. You know how dearly that scoff did cost them, though but children, that spake it to the prophet, 'Go up, thou bald-head, go up, thou bald-head,' 2 Kings ii. 23; where they did not only revile him with that nick-name of bald-head, but made a mock and jeer of Elijah's rapture into heaven, as if they had said, You make us believe your master is gone up to heaven; why do not you go up after him, that we may be rid of both your companies at once? And we need not wonder that these children should rise to such a height of wickedness so soon, if you observe the place where they lived at, Bethel, which was most infamous for idolitary, and one of the two cities where Jeroboam did set up his calves, 1 Kings xii. 28; so that this seems but the natural language which they learnt, no doubt, from their idolatrous parents. God met with Michal also for despising her husband, merely upon a religious account, because he shewed a holy zeal for God, which her proud spirit (as many others since have done) thought it too mean and base for a king to do. Well, what is her punishment? 'Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.' The service of God was too low for a king, in her thoughts; therefore shall none come out of her womb to sit on the throne, or wear a crown. It is great wickedness to mock at the calamity of another. 'He that mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker,' Pro. xvii. 5; yea, to laugh at and triumph over a saint's transgression is a heavy sin; so did some sons of Belial, when David fell into that sad temptation of adultery and murder; and they are indicted for blaspheming God upon that account. What then is it to mock one for his holiness? Sin carries some cause of shame, and gives naughty hearts an occasion to reproach him they see besmeared with that which is so inglorious and unbecoming especially in a saint. But holiness is honourable, and stamps dignity on the person that hath it. It is not only the nobility of the creature, but the honour of the most high God himself: so runs his title of honour, 'Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?' Exod. xv. 11; so that none can mock that, but upon the same account he must mock God infinitely more, because there is infinitely more of that holiness, which he jeers at in the creature, to be found in God, than all the creatures, men and angels, in both worlds, have among them. If you would contrive a way how to cast the greatest dishonour upon God possible, you could not hit on the like to this. The Romans, when they would put contempt upon any, and degrade them of their nobility, they commanded that those their statues and portraitures, which were set up in the city or temples to their memory, should all be broken down. Every saint is a lively image of God; and the more holy, the more like God: when thou, therefore, puttest scorn on them, and that for their holiness, now thou touchest God's honour nearly indeed. Will nothing less content thee, but thou must deface that image of his, which he hath erected with so much cost in his saints, on purpose that they might be a praise to him in the earth? Was it such horrible wickedness in those heathens 'to cast fire into the sanctuary, and to break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers?'

Digitized by Google

Psa. lxxiv. 6, 7; of which the church makes her moan, ver. 10: 'O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?' What then is in thy devlish malice, whose rage is spent, not on wood and stones, but the carved work of his Spirit, the grace and holiness of his living temples?

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS, IN THREE BRANCHES.

Use 3. Thirdly, It may be for exhortation to the saints, in several particulars: I shall only name three, because I have directed myself in the whole discourse chiefly to them.

First, Bless God that hath furnished thee with this breastplate. Canst thou do less, when thou seest such multitudes on every hand slain before thy face by the destroyer of souls, for want of this piece to defend their naked breasts against his murdering shot? Had God made thee great and rich in the world but not holy, he had but given thee stock to trade with for hell. These would have made thee a greater booty for Satan, and only procured in the end a deeper damnation. When an enemy comes before a city that hath no walls nor arms to defend it, truly the richer it is, the worse it fares; when Satan comes to a man that hath much of the world about him, but nothing of God in his soul to defend him, O what miserable work doth he make with such! He takes what he pleaseth, and doth what he will; purse, and all the poor wretch hath, is at his command. Let a lust ask never so unreasonably, he hath not a heart to deny it; though he knows what the gratifying of it will cost him in another world, yet he will damn his soul rather than displease his lust! Herod throws half his kingdom at the foot of a wanton wench, if she will ask it; and because that was thought too little by her, he will sacrifice his whole kingdom to his lust; for so much the blood of John the Baptist may be judged to have cost him in this life,—being (so wakeful, was Divine Providence) shortly after turned out of his throne,—besides what he pays in the other. But when God made thee a holy man or woman, than he gave thee gates and bars to thy city; thou art now able through his grace to stand on thy defence, and with the continual succours Heaven sends thee to withstand all his power. Thou wert once indeed a tame slave to him, but now he is a servant to thee; that day thou becamest holy, God did set thy foot on the serpent's head. Thy lust were once his strongholds, with which he kept thee in awe, and out of which he did come and do thee so much hurt; but now these are out of his hand. O, what joy is there in a town, when a castle that commanded it is taken from the enemy; Now, poor soul, Satan is dislodged, never more shall he be ruler in thy soul as he hath been. In a word, when thou wert made a holy, righteous person, than did God begin heaven in thy soul; that day thou wert born again, an heir to heaven was born. And if such acclamations be at the birth of a young prince, heir to some petty territories, hast not thou more cause that then hadst heaven's glory settled on thee in reversion, especially if thou considerest where all thy inheritance lay a little before, that thou couldst lay claim to? Paul joins both together to make his doxology full, 1 Cor. xii. 13: 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son! O blessed change! to step out of the devil's dark dungeon, where thou wert kept in chains of sin and unrighteousness, prisoner for hell, into the kingdom of Christ's grace, where thou hast the golden chain of holiness and righteousness put about thy neck as heir-apparent to heaven; such honour have all his saints.

Secondly, Look thou keepest thy breastplate on, Christian. Need we bid the soldier be careful of his armour, when he goes into the field? can he easily forget to take that with him, or be persuaded to leave it behind him? yet some have done so, and paid dear for their boldness. Better thou endure the weight of thy plate, though a little cumbersome to the flesh, than receive a wound in thy breast for want of it: let this piece fall off, and thou canst keep none of the other on. If thou allowest thyself in any unholiness, thy sincerity, that will presently be called into question in thy conscience. I confess we find that

Digitized by Google

Peter, a little after his sad fall in denying of his master, had they testimony of his uprightness, John, xx. 17: 'Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.' After Christ had thrice put it to the question, he could confidently vouch his sincerity; but we must know, first, that his sin was not a deliberate sin—the poor man was surprised on a sudden; and secondly, there had intervened his bitter sorrow between his sin and this his profession; and the renewing of his repentance so speedily conduced much to the clearing of his sincerity to his conscience. But David found it harder work, who sinned more deliberately, and lay longer in his guilt, as you may perceive, Psa. li. 10, where he pleads so earnestly that God would 'renew a right spirit in him.'

Again, the gospel shoe will not come on thy foot so long as swelled with any sinful humour, (I mean any unrighteous or unholy practice,) till assuaged and purged out by repentance. Consider the gospel in its preparation; art thou in a fit case to suffer cheerfuly for God, or patiently from God, as thou art? No more than a soldier in a disease sick in bed is to take a hard march. Unholiness affects the soul as much as sickness doth the body, and indisposeth it to endure any hardship. 'O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength before I go hence, and be no more,' Psa. xxxix. 13. David was not yet recovered out of that sin, which had brought him exceeding low, as you may perceive, ver. 10, 11. And the good man cannot think of dying with any willingness till his heart be in a holier frame: and for the 'peace of the gospel,' serenity of conscience, and inward joy; alas, all unholiness is to it as poison is to the spirits which drink them up; throw a stone into a brook, and though clear before, it presently is stirred up and muddy. 'He will speak peace unto his people; but let them not turn again to folly,' Psa. lxxxv. 8. Mark here, what an *item* he gives, 'But let them not turn;' as if he had said, Upon their peril be it; if they turn from holy walking to folly, I will turn from speaking peace to speak terror.

Again, by thy negligence in thy holy walking, thou endangerest thy faith, which is kept in a good conscience as the jewel in the cabinet; faith is an eye; all sin and unholiness cast a mist before this eye. A holy life to faith, is as a clear air and medium to the eye; we can see farthest in a clear day; thus faith sees farthest into the promise, when it looks through a holy, well ordered conversation; faith is a shield, and when does the soldier drop that out of his hand but when dangerously wounded? And if faith fail, what will become of hope, which hangs upon faith, and draws all her nourishment from her, as the sucking child does from the nurse? If faith cannot see a pardon in the promise, then hope cannot look for salvation; if faith cannot lay claim to sonship, then hope will not wait for the inheritance; faith tells the soul it hath 'peace with God,' then the soul 'rejoiceth in the hope of glory,' Rom. v. And now, Christian, what hast thou yet left for thy help? wilt thou betake thyself to the sword of the Spirit? alas, how canst thou wield it, when, by thy unholy walking, thou hast lamed thy hand of faith that should hold it! This sword hath two edges; with one it heals, with the other it wounds; with one it saves, with the other it damns. O, it is a dreadful weapon when it strikes with its wounding, damning side; and the other side thou hast nothing to do with, while in any way of unholiness. Not a kind word in the whole Bible spoken to one sinning. Now, poor creature, think and think again, is there any sin worth hazarding all this confusion and mischief, which if thou art resolved to have it, will inevitably befall thy soul?

Thirdly, Be humble when thou art most holy. Which way soever pride works, (as thou shalt find it like the wind, sometimes at one door, and sometimes at another,) resist it. Nothing more baneful to thy holiness. It turns righteousness into hemlock, holiness into sin. Never art thou less holy, than when puffed up with the conceit of it. When we see a man swelled with the dropsy, we can tell his blood is naught and waterish, without opening a vein for the trial; the more pride puffs thee, the less pure blood of holiness hast thou running in the veins of thy soul. 'Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright,' Hab. ii. 4. See an *ecce*, like a sign, is set up at the proud man's door, that all passengers may know a wicked man dwells there. As thou wouldst not, therefore, not only enfeeble the power of holiness, but also call in question the truth of thy holiness, take heed of pride. Sometimes possibly thou wilt be

Digitized by Google

ready to despise others, and bid them in thy thoughts stand off, as not so holy as thyself; this smells of the Pharisee—beware of it. It is the nature of holiness to depress ourselves, and to give our brethren the advantage in measuring their gifts or graces with our own: 'In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves,' Phil. ii. 3. At another time possibly thou mayest find a spice of the justiciary's desease hanging about thee, thy heart leaning on thy righteousness, and lifting up thyself into confidence of it, so as to expect thy acceptance with it, and salvation from God for that. O take heed of this, as thou lovest thy life. I may say to thee, as Constantine did to Acetius the Novatian, 'Set then up thy ladder, and go to heaven by thyself, for never any went this way thither;' and dost thou think to be the only man that shall appear in heaven purchaser of his own happiness? Go, first, poor creature, and measure the length of thy ladder by the extent of the holy law; and if thou findest it but one round short of that, thou mayest certainly conclude it will leave thee short of heaven; if, therefore, thou hast beheld, to allude to that in Job xxxi. 27, thy righteousness, when it hath shined, and thy holiness walking in its brightness, and thy heart hereby hath been enticed secretly, or thy mouth hath kissed thy hand, know this is a great wickedness, and in this thou hast denied the God above. Thou hast given the highest part of divine worship unto a creature, the created son of thy inherent holiness, which God hath appointed should be given alone to the uncreated Son of righteousness, the Lord Jesus, the Lord our righteousness. Renounce thy plea, as now thou hast laid it, for life and salvation, or else give thy cause as lost. Now, the more effectually to keep down any insurrection of pride, from the conceit of thy holiness, be pleased to take often these soul-humbling considerations into thy serious thoughts.

First, Think frequently of the infinite holiness of God. When men stand high, their heads do not grow dizzy till they look down; when men look down upon those that are worse than themselves, or less holy than themselves, then their heads turn round; looking up would cure this disease. The most holy men, when once they have fixed their eyes awhile upon God's holiness, and then looked upon themselves, they have been quite out of love with themselves, and could see nothing but unholiness in themselves. After the vision the prophet had of God sitting on his throne, and his heavenly ministers of state, the seraphims about him, covering their faces, and crying, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,' how was this gracious man presently smitten with the sense of his own vileness! they did not more cry up God as holy, than he did cry out upon himself as unclean, Isa. vi. 5. So Job, 'Now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself,' chap. xlii. 5, 6. Never did the good man more loathe himself for the putrid sores of his ulcerous body, when on the dunghill he sat and scraped himself, than now he did for the impurities of his soul; we see ourselves in a dark room, and we think we are fine and clean; but would we compass ourselves with the beams of God's glorious majesty and holiness, then the sun rays would not discover more atoms in the air, than the holiness of God would convince of sin to be in us. But it is the trick of pride not to come where it may be outshone; it had rather go where it shall be adored, than where it is sure to be put to shame.

Secondly, Often meditate of the holiness of man's innocent state. It is true, now, if a believer, thou hast a principle of holiness planted in thee; but alas! what is that at present to what thy nature once had? They who saw the second temple, and remembered not the first which Solomon built, they thought it no doubt a glorious fabric; but others, whose eyes had seen the stately work and goodly buildings of the other, could not but rejoice with tears in their eyes, Ezra iii. 12: 'Many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid, wept with a loud voice.' O, it revived the sad thoughts of the sacking of that glorious structure; and so may this little beginning upon a new foundation of the new covenant, remind thee with sorrow to think of the ruins that man in all his glory fell into by Satan's policy. It is true, in heaven thou shalt have the odds of Adam in paradise; but thou shalt have many a weary step before thou gettest up that hill; when a man who hath some thousands a year, hath now but a few pounds per annum allowed him, and the rest sequestered from him for thirty or forty years, it is sad, though comfortable also, to

Digitized by Google

think it shall at last return, and may be with a great overplus: but at present he is put to many straits, and fain to make a hard shift to rub through, so as to live anything like his noble descent and family. Thus it is joyous to the saint to think of heaven, when all his means shall come into his hands; but truly his imperfect grace, and the many expenses he is at, from afflictions at God's hands, temptations at Satan's mutinies, and intestine broils from remaining lusts within doors, do put him into many sad straits, that the poor soul is fain often to snap short in his comfort; yea, much ado he hath to keep his shop windows open with the little stock he hath; hence the Christian's getting to heaven is set out as a business of so much difficulty. 'If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?' 1 Pet. iv. 18. The wise virgins had no oil to spare; the Christian shall hold out, and that is even all. Think of this, and let fall thy plume.

Thirdly, Often meditate of thy own personal miscarriages, especially in thy unregenerate state. This kept Paul so humble; how often does his unregenerate, wicked conversation rise, though not in his conscience, to darken his comfort, yet in his mind to qualify the thoughts of his gifts and grace; 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10, where he speaks how he 'laboured more than them all.' O how he waylays his pride, that possibly might follow such his gloring too close at the heels; and, therefore, before he dares speak a word of his present holiness, he bolts the door upon pride, and first falls upon the story of that black part of his life. O, how he batters his pride, and speaks himself all to naught! no enemy could have drawn his picture with a blacker coal, ver. 8, he calls himself one 'born out of time;' ver. 9: 'For I am the least of the apostles, not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God;' and now having sufficiently besmeared and doused himself in the puddle of his former sins, how humbly doth the holy man speak of his transcendent graces, ver. 10: 'By the grace of God I am what I am, and I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God.' O, this is the way of killing this weed of pride, to break up our hearts, and turn the inside outward—I mean humble and abase ourselves for our former abominations. Pride will not easily thrive in a soil where this plough often walks. Pride is a worm that bites and gnaws out the heart of grace. Now you know those are bitter things that must break the bag of worms that are gathered in the stomach; all sweet things nourish them; they are bitter that scatter and kill them. O Christians, take some quantity of this aloe often, and with God's blessing thou shalt find ease of that, which if a Christian, thou art troubled withal. And do not think that this worm breeds only in children, weak Christians, and young novices; I confess it is the most ordinary disease of that age; but aged and stronger Christians are not out of danger. Old David had this worm of pride at his heart, when he bade Joab number the people; and dost not thou too often take thyself in numbering the duties and good works thou hast done, and the sufferings thou hast endured for thy God, with some secret self-applauding thoughts that tickle thee from them?

VERSE 15.—*And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*

THIS verse presents us with the third piece of armour in the Christian's panoply —a spiritual shoe, fitted to his foot, and to be worn by him, so long as he keeps the field against sin and Satan. 'And your feet shod,' &c. We shall cast the words into distinct questions or inquiries, from the resolution of which will result the several points to be insisted on.

First, what is meant by the gospel?

Secondly, What by peace, and why attributed to the gospel?

Thirdly, What the feet here mentioned import, and what grace is intended by the 'preparation of the gospel of peace,' which here is compared to the shoe, and fitted for these feet?

Quest. What is meant by the gospel?

Ans. Gospel, according to the notation of the original word, signifies any good news, or joyful message; so Jer. xx. 15, 'Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man-child is born to thee, to make him glad.' But usually in Scripture, it is restrained, by way of excellency, to signify the

Digitized by Google

doorine of Christ, and salvation by him to poor sinners. 'I bring you glad tidings,' saith the angel to the shepherds, 'of great joy,' Luke ii. 10; and ver. 11, he addeth, 'Unto you is born a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord,' Thus it is taken in this place, and generally in the New Testament, and affords this note.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN THE GLADSOME NEWS THAT THE GOSPEL BRINGS IS DECLARED FROM THE FIVE PARTICULARS REQUISITE TO FILL UP THE JOYFULNESS OF A MESSAGE; WITH A WORD TO STIR UP OUR BOWELS IN PITYING THOSE THAT NEVER HEARD ANY OF THIS NEWS.

Note. THE revelation of Christ, and the grace of God through him, is beyond comparison the best news and most joyful tidings that poor sinners can hear. It is such a message that no good news can come before it, nor ill news follow it. No good news can come before it; no, not from God himself to the creature; he cannot issue out any blessing to poor sinners, till he hath shewn mercy to their souls in Christ. 'God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us,' Psa. lxvii. 1.

First, God forgives, then he gives; till he be merciful to pardon our sins through Christ, he cannot bless, or look kindly on us sinners. All our enjoyments are but blessings in bullion, till gospel grace, pardoning mercy, stamp and make them current; God cannot so much as bear any goodwill to us, till Christ makes peace for us; 'on earth peace, good will to men,' Luke ii. 14. And what joy can a sinner take, though it were to hear of a kingdom fallen to him, if he may not have it with God's good will.

Again, No ill news can come after the glad tidings of the gospel, where believingly embraced. God's mercy in Christ alters the very property of all evils to the believer. All plagues and judgments that can befall the creature in the world, when baptized in the stream of gospel grace, receive a new name, come on a new errand, and have a new taste on the believer's palate; as the same water, by running through some mine, gets a strong taste and a healing virtue, which before it had not, Isa. xxxiii. 24: 'The inhabitant shall not say I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be pardoned their iniquity.' Observe, he doth not say, 'they shall not be sick;' gospel grace doth not exempt from afflictions; but, 'they shall not say I am sick.' They shall be so ravished with the joy of God's pardoning mercy, that they shall not complain of being sick; this, or any other cross, is too thin a veil to darken the joy of the other good news. This is so joyful a message which the gospel brings, that God would not have Adam long without it, but opened a crevice to let some beams of this light, that is pleasant to behold, into his soul, amazed with the terror of God's presence, without which, as he was turned out of paradise, so had he been turned into hell immediately; for such the world would have been to his guilty conscience. This is the news God used to tell his people of, on a design to comfort them and cheer them, when things went worse with them, and their affairs were at the lowest ebb, Isa. vii. 14; Micah v. 5. This is the great secret which God whispers by his Spirit in the ear of those whom he embraces with his special distinguishing love, Luke x. 21; 1 Cor. ii. 12; so that it is made the sad sign of a soul marked out for hell, to have the 'gospel hid from it,' 2 Cor. iv. 3. To wind up this in a few words, there meet all the properties of a joyful message in the glad tidings of the gospel. Five ingredients are desirable in a message, yea, must all conspire to fill up the enjoyment thereof into a redundancy.

First, 'It must be good;' none rejoice to hear evil news. Joy is the dilatation of the heart, whereby it goes forth to meet and welcome in what it desires; and this must needs be some good. Ill news is sure to find the heart shut against it, and to come before it is welcome.

Secondly, 'It must be some great good,' or else it affects little; affections are moved according to the degrees of good or evil in the object presented. A thing we hear may be so inconsiderable, that it is no great matter how it goes; but if it be good, and great also, and of weighty importance, this causeth proportionable pleasure. The greater the bell, the more strength is required to raise it. It must be a great good that raiseth great joy.

Thirdly, 'This great good must immediately concern them that hear it;' that

Digitized by Google

is, they must have propriety in it; for though we can rejoice to hear of some great good befalling another, yet it affects most when it is emptied into our own bosom. A sick man doth not feel the joy of another's recovery with the same advantage as he would do his own.

Fourthly, It would much add to the joyfulness of the news, if this were *inauditum* or *insperatum*, 'unheard of, unlooked for,' when the tidings steal upon us by way of surprise. The farther our own ignorance or despair have set us from all thoughts of so great enjoyment, the more joy it brings with it, when we hear the news of it. The joy of a poor swineherd's son, who never dreamed of a crown, would be greater at the news of such a thing conferred on him, than he whose birth invited him to look for it, yea, promised it him as his inheritance; such a one's heart would stand but level to the place, and therefore could not be so ravished with it as another who lay so far below such a preferment.

Lastly, To fill up the joy of all these, 'it is most necessary that the news be true and certain,' or else all the joy soon leaks out. What great joy would it afford to hear of a kingdom befallen to a man, and the next day or month to hear all crossed again, and prove false? Now, in the glad tidings of the gospel, all these do most happily meet together, to wind up the joy of the believing soul to the highest pin that the strings of his affections can possibly bear.

First, The news which the gospel hath in its mouth to tell us poor sinners is good. It speaks promises, and they are significations of some good intended by God for poor sinners. The law, that brings ill news to town, threatenings are the *lingua vernacula legis*, it can speak no other language to sinners, but denunciations of evil to come upon them; but the gospel smiles on poor sinners, and planes the wrinkles that sit on the law's brow, by proclaiming promises.

Secondly, The news the gospel brings is as great as good. It was that the angel said, Luke ii. 10, 'I bring you tidings of great joy;' great joy it must needs be, because it is all joy. The Lord Christ brings such news in his gospel, as that he hath left nothing for any after him to add to it; if there be any good wanting in the tidings of the gospel, we find it elsewhere than in God; for in the covenant of the gospel, he gives himself through Christ to the believing soul: surely the apostle's argument will hold, 'All things are yours, ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's,' 1 Cor. iii. 22. The gospel lays our ducts close to the fountain of goodness itself, and he surely must have all, that is united to him that hath, that is, all. Can any good news come to the glorified saints which heaven doth not afford them? In the gospel we have news of that glory. 'Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light by the gospel,' 2 Tim. i. 10. The sun in the firmament discovers only the lower world; *Obsignat cœlum, dum revelat terram;* O it hides heaven from us, while it shews the earth to us; but the gospel enlightens both at once. 'Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,' 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Thirdly, The gospel doth not tell us news we are little concerned in; not what God has done for angels, but for us: 'Unto you,' saith the angel, 'is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.' If love made angels rejoice in our happiness, surely the benefit which is paid into our nature by it gives a farther pleasure to our joy at the hearing of it. It were strange that the messenger, who only brings the news of some great empire to be devolved on a person, should sing, and the prince to whom it falls should not be glad. And, as the gospel's glad tidings belong to man's nature, not to angels, so in particular to the poor soul, whoever thou art, that embraceth Christ in the arms of thy faith. A prince is a common good to all his kingdom; every subject, though never so mean, hath a part in him, and so is Christ to all believers. The promises are so laid, that, like a well-drawn picture, they look on all that look on them by an eye of faith. The gospel's joy is thy joy, that hast but faith to receive it.

Fourthly, The glad tidings of the gospel were unheard of, unlooked for, by the sons of men; such news it brings, as never could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, till God unlocked the cabinet of his own good pleasure and revealed the council of his will, wherein this mysterious piece, of love to fallen man, lay hid far enough from the prying eye of the most quick-sighted angel in heaven, much more from man himself, who could read in his own guilty

Digitized by Google

conscience within, and spell from the covenant without, now broken by him, nothing but his certain doom and damnation. So that the first gospel sermon preached by God himself to Adam anticipated all thoughts of such a thing intended by him. O, who can conceive, but one that hath really felt the terrors of an approaching hell in his despairing soul, how joyous the tidings of gospel mercy is to a poor soul, dwelling amidst the black thoughts of despair, and bordering on the very marches of the region of utter darkness! History tells us of a nobleman of our nation in King Henry the Eighth's reign, to whom a pardon was sent a few hours before he should have been beheaded, which, being not at all expected by him, so transported him that he died for joy. And if the vessel of our nature be so weakly hooped, that the wine of such an inferior joy breaks it, how then could it possibly be able to bear the full joy of the gospel tidings, which doth as far exceed this, as the mercy of God doth the mercy of mortal man, and as the deliverance from an eternal death in hell doth a deliverance from a temporary death, which is gone before the pain can well be felt?

Fifthly and lastly, The glad tidings of the gospel are certainly true. It is no flying report, cried up to-day, and like to be crossed to-morrow; not news that is in every one's mouth, but none can tell whence it came, and who is the author of it; we have it from a good hand, God himself, 'to whom it is impossible to lie,' he from heaven voucheth it. 'This is my beloved Son, hear him,' Luke ix. What were all those miracles which Christ wrought, but ratifications of the truth of the gospel? Those wretches that denied the truth of Christ's doctrine were forced many times to acknowledge the divinity of his miracles; which is a pretty piece of nonsense, and declares the absurdity of their unbelief to all the world. The miracles were to the gospel, as seals to a writing They could not deny God to be in the miracles, and yet they could not see him in the doctrine; as if God would set his seal to an untruth. Here, Christians, is that which fills up the joy of this good news the gospel brings; that we may lay our lives upon the truth of it, it will never deceive any that lay the weight of their confidence on it. 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,' 1 Tim. i. 15. This bridge which the gospel lays over the gulf of God's wrath for poor sinners to pass from their sins into the favour of God here, and kingdom of God hereafter, is supported with no other arches than the wisdom, power, mercy, and faithfulness of God; so that the believing soul need not fear, till it sees these bow or break. It is called the 'everlasting gospel,' Rev. xiv. 16. When heaven and earth go to wreck, not the least iota or tittle of any promise of the gospel shall be buried in their ruins. 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached to you,' 1 Pet. i. 25.

Use 1. Pity them that never heard a word of this good news. Such there are in the world, whole nations, with whom the day is not yet broke, but a dismal night of ignorance and barbarism continues to be stretched over them; whose forlorn souls are under a continual massacre from the bloody butcher of hell. An easy conquest, God knows, that foul fiend makes of them, who lays his murderous knife to their throats, and meets with no resistance; because he finds them fast asleep in ignorance, utterly destitute of that light which can alone discover a way to escape the hands of this destroyer. What heart, that ever tasted the sweetness of gospel grace, trembles not at their deplorable state? yea, doth not stand astonished at the difference of God's dispensations to them and us? 'Lord, why wilt thou manifest thyself to us, and not to the world!' God pardon the unmercifulness of our hearts, that we can weep no more over them. Truly, we do not live so far from the Moors and Indians, but we may, by not pitying of them, praying for them, and earnestly desiring their conversion, besmear ourselves with the guilt of their soul's blood, which is shed continually by the destroyer of mankind. O how seldom is their miserable condition the companion of our sorrowful thoughts, and their conversion the subject of our prayers and desires! There have been, alas, in the world, more counsels how to ease them of their gold, than enrich them with the treasure of the gospel: how to get their land, than how to save their souls! But the time is coming, when winning souls will be found more honourable than conquering nations. Well, Christian, though thou canst not impart to them what God hath laid on thy

Digitized by Google

trencher, yet as thou sittest at the feast of the gospel, think of those poor souls, and that compassionately, who starve to death for want of that bread with which thou art fed unto eternal life. There is an opinion which some have lately taken up, that the heathens may spell Christ out of the sun, moon, and stars. These may seem kinder than others have been to them, but I wish it doth not make them more cruel to them in the end; I mean by not praying so heartily for gospel light to arise among them, as those must needs do, who believe them under a sad necessity of perishing without it. When a garrison is judged pretty well stored with provision for its defence, it is an occasion that relief and succour come the slower to it; and I wish Satan had not such a design against those forlorn souls in this principle; if such a lesson were to be got by the stars, we should before this have heard of some that had learned it. Indeed, I find a star led the wise men to Christ, but they had a heavenly preacher to open the text to them, or else they would never have understood it.

CHAPTER II.

A LAMENTATION FOR THE UNKIND WELCOME THAT GOSPEL NEWS FINDS IN THE WORLD: WITH TWO OR THREE SAD GROUNDS OF FEAR AS TO US IN THIS NATION, TAKEN FROM THE PRESENT ENTERTAINMENT THE GOSPEL HATH AMONG US; WITH A DOUBLE EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS TO REJOICE IN THIS JOYOUS MESSAGE, AND CHIEFLY IN THIS.

SECTION I.—*Use* 2. A sad lamentation may be here taken up, that so good news should have such ill welcome as the gospel commonly finds in the world. When the tidings were first told at Jerusalem of a Saviour being born, one would have thought, especially if we consider that the Scripture reckoning was now out for the birth of the Messias, and they big with expectation of his coming, that all hearts should have leaped within them for joy at the news, to see their hopes so happily delivered and accomplished; but behold the contrary! Christ's coming proves matter of trouble and distaste to them; they take the alarm at his birth, as if an enemy, a destroyer, not a Saviour, were landed on their coast; and as such Herod sends out against him, and makes him flee the country. But possibly, though at present they stumble at the meanness of his birth and parentage, yet when the rays of his divinity shall shine through his miracles, then they will religiously worship him whom now they contemn, when he comes forth into his public ministry, opens his commission, and shows his authority; yea, with his own blessed lips tells the joyful message he brings from his father unto the sons of men; then surely they will dearly love his person, and thankfully embrace, yea, greedily drink in the glad tidings of salvation which he preached to them; but no! they persist in their cursed unbelief and obstinate rejection of him; though the Scripture, which they seem to adore, bears so full a testimony for Christ, that it accuseth them to their own consciences, yet they will have none of him. Christs tells them so much: John v. 39, 40, 'Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.' Life they desired, yet will lose it rather than come to him for it. And is the world now amended? doth Christ in his gospel meet with any kinder usage at the hands of most? The note that Christ sings is still the same, 'Come unto me, that you may have life.' The worst hurt Christ does poor souls that come unto him is, to put them into a state of life and salvation; and yet where is the person that likes the offer? O, it is other news that men generally listen after; this makes the exchange, the market-place, so full, and the church so thin and empty. Most expect to hear their best news from the world; they look upon the news of the gospel as foreign, and that which doth not so much concern them, at least at present; it is time enough to mind this when they are going into another world. Alas, the gospel is not accommodated to their carnal desires; it tells them of no fields and vineyards it hath to give, it lures them not with the gaieties of worldly honours and pleasures. Had Christ in his gospel but gratified the cravings of men's lusts with a few promises for these things, though he had promised less for another world, the news would have gone down better with these sots, who had rather hear one prophesy of wine and strong

Digitized by Google

drink than preach of heaven itself. Truly, they are but a very few, and those sufficiently jeered for their pains, that like the message of the gospel so well as to receive it cordially into their hearts: if any one does but give entertainment to Christ, and it be known, what an alarm does it give to all carnal neighbours! who, if they do not presently beset his house, as the Sodomites did Lot's, yet set some brand of scorn upon him, yea, make account they have now reason enough to despise and hate him, how well soever they loved him before. O what will God do with this degenerate age! O England, England! I fear some sad judgment or other bodes thee! if such glad tidings as the gospel brings be rejected, sad news cannot be far off—I cannot think of less than of a departing gospel. God never made such a settlement of his gospel among any people, but he could remove it from them. He comes but upon liking; and will he stay where he is not welcome? Who will that hath elsewhere to go? It is high time for the merchant to pack up and be gone when few or none will buy, nay, when, instead of buying, they will not suffer him to be quiet in his shop, but throw stones at him, and dirt on his richest commodities. Do we not see the names of Christ's faithful messengers bleeding at this day under the reproaches that fly so thick about their ears? Are not the most precious truths of the gospel almost covered with the mire and dirt of errors and blasphemies which men of corrupt minds, set on work by the devil himself, have raked out of every filthy puddle and sink of old heretics, and thrown on the face of Christ and his gospel? And where is the hand so kind as to wipe off that which they throw on?—the heart so valiant for the truth, that will stop these foul mouths from spitting their venom against Christ and his gospel? If anything be done of this kind, alas, it is so faintly that they gather heart by it! justice is so favourably sprinkled, like a few drops upon a fire, that it rather increaseth the flame of their rage against the truth, than quencheth it. A prince calls not home his ambassador for every affront that is offered him in the streets, but when he is affronted and can have no redress for the wrong.

SECTION II.—*Object.* But some may say, Though it cannot be denied that the gospel hath found very unkind entertainment by many among us, and especially of late years, since a spirit of error hath so sadly prevailed in the land, yet make us not worse than we are. There is, blessed be God, a remnant of gracious souls yet to be found to whom Christ is precious, who gladly embrace the message of the gospel, and weep in secret for the contempt that is cast upon it by men of corrupt minds and profane hearts; and, therefore, we hope we are not in such imminent danger of losing the gospel as your fears suggest.

Ans. If there were not such a sprinkling of saints among us, our case were indeed desperate, *Conclusum esset de nobis.* The shades of that dismal night would quickly be upon us. These are they that have held the gospel thus long among us. Christ had, as to his gospel presence, been gone before this, had not these hung about him, and with their strong cries and prayers entreated his stay. But there are a few considerations as to these, which, seriously weighed, will not leave us without some tremblings of heart.

First, Consider what little proportion, as to number I mean, do those that embrace the gospel bear to those that continue to reject it; those that desire to keep Christ among us, to those that wish him gone, and would gladly be rid of him. Were it put to the vote, would not they carry it by thousands of thousands, that care not whether we have a gospel or not? and doth it not prophesy sadly when the odds are so great? In all the departures of God from a people, there were ever some holy ones mingled amongst the multitude of sinners. Sardis had her 'few names which had not defiled their garments,' but yet the 'candlestick was removed.' All that they could get was a promise for themselves in particular, Rev. iii. 4, 'They shall walk with me in white;' but no protection for the church. God can pull down the house, and provide well for his saints also that he finds there. A few voices are easily drowned by the outcry of a multitude; a few pints of wine are hardly tasted in a tun of water; and a little number of saints can do sometimes but little to the saving of a wretched people among whom they live. Possibly, as in a weak body, where the disease hath got the mastery, nature putting forth its *summum conatum*, its utmost strength, may keep life awhile in the body, some days or weeks, but cannot long without some help to evacuate the distemper; so a few saints, shut up in a degenerate

Digitized by Google

age amongst an ungodly, Christ-despising people, may awhile prorogue the judgment and reprieve awhile the life of such a people; but if there be no change made upon them for the better, ruin must needs break in upon them.

Secondly, Consider of these few gracious ones found amongst us, that embrace the gospel, how many are new converts, such I mean as the gospel hath of late days won to Christ? I am afraid you will find this little number of saints chiefly to consist of old disciples, such as were wrought upon many years since. Alas; the womb of the gospel hath been in a great measure shut up of late as to the bringing forth of souls by a thorough solid work of conversion. Indeed, if they may pass for converts that baptize themselves into a new way and form of worship, or that begin their religion with a tenet and an opinion, we have more than a good many to shew of these; but in this old age of England's withered profession, how great a rarity is a sincere convert! We cannot deny but God is graciously pleased to bring the pangs of the new birth now and then upon some poor souls in our assemblies, that his despised servants may have his seal to confirm their ministry, and stop those mouths which are so scornfully opened against it; yet, alas! it is but here and there one: and doth not this prophesy sadly to this nation? I am sure, when we see a tree that used to stand thick with fruit, now bring forth but little, may be an apple on this bough, and another on that, we look upon it as a dying tree. Leah comforted herself from her fruitfulness, 'that therefore her husband would love her, and cleave to her,' Gen. xxix. 34. May we not, on the contrary, fear that God will not love, but leave a people when they grow barren under the means of grace? God threatens as much, Jer. vi. 8: 'Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee;' and if God departs, then he is upon his remove as to his visible presence also; so indeed it follows, 'lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited?' O my brethren, those golden days of the gospel are over, when converts came flying as a cloud, as the doves to their windows in flocks. Now gospel news grows stale, few are taken with it. Though a kingdom hath much treasure and riches in it, yet if trade cease, no new bullion comes in, nor merchandise be imported, it spends upon its old stock, and must needs in time decay; our old store of saints, the treasure of their times, wears away apace: what will become of us, if no new ones come in their room? Alas! when our burials are more than our births, we must needs be on the losing hand. There is a sad list of holy names taken away from us; but where are they which are born to God? If the good go, and those which are left continue bad, yea, become worse and worse, we have season to fear that God is clearing the ground, and making way for a judgment.

Thirdly, Consider the unhappy contentions and divisions that are found among the people of God yet left upon the place: these prophesy sadly, the Lord knows. Contentions ever portended ill. The remarkable departures of God, recorded in Scripture, from the church of the Jews, found them wofully divided and crumbled into parties, and the Asiatic churches no less. Christ sets up the light of his gospel to walk and work by, not to fight and wrangle; and, therefore, it were no wonder at all if he should put it out, and so end the dispute. If these storms, which have been of late years upon us, and are not yet off, had but made Christians, as that did the disciples, Mark vi. 48, ply their oars, and lovingly row all one way, it had been happy; we might then have expected Christ to come walking towards us in mercy, and help us safe to land; but when we throw away the oar, and fall to strife in the ship, while the wind continues loud about us, truly we are more likely to drive Christ from us, than invite him to us; we are in a more probable way of sinking than saving of the ship and ourselves in it.

Section III.—*Use* 3. A word of exhortation; and first to you who yet have not closed with the terms of the gospel. Be persuaded to receive the message of the gospel kindly, believingly into your hearts; it is the best news you can send back to heaven, as a gratulatory return for the glad tidings that the gospel brings from thence. Thy embracing Christ preached to thee in the gospel, will be as welcome news to heaven, I can tell thee, as the tidings of Christ and salvation through him can be to thee. There is joy in heaven at the conversion of a sinner. Those angels which sang Christ into the world, will not want a song when he is received into thy heart, for he came into the world for this end. Christ descended

Digitized by Google

when he came into the world, but now he ascends: that was an act of his humiliation, this of exaltation. The highest created throne that God can sit in is the soul of a believer: no wonder then that Christ calls all his friends to joy with him at a soul's return to him and reception of him, Luke xv. 9. What joy is now in heaven upon this occasion we may collect from the joy it drew from Christ when on earth. It was some great good news that could wring a smile then from Christ, or tune his spirit into a joyful note, who was a man of sorrows, and indeed came into the world to be so; yet when his disciples, whom he had sent forth to preach the gospel, returned with news of some victorious success of their labours, 'in that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father,' Luke x. 21. Of all the hours of his life, that is the hour wherein Christ would express his joy; which with the care of the Spirit to record this passage in the history of Christ's life, shews that Christ had an especial design in that expression of his joy at that time; and what could it be, but to let us know how much his heart was set upon the work of saving souls? and that when he should be gone to heaven, if we meant to send any joyful news to him thither, it should be of the prosperous and victorous success the gospel hath over our hearts? This, this which could make him rejoice in the midst of his sorrows here on earth, must be more joyous to him in heaven, now that he hath no bitterness from his own sufferings, which are all healed, past, and gone, to mingle with the joy of this news; and, if the kind reception of the gospel be such joyful news to him, you may easily conceive how distasteful the rejecting of it is to him. As he rejoiced in spirit to hear the gospel prevailed, so he cannot but be angry when it meets with a repulse from the unbelieving world. Luke xiv. 21, we find the master of the house, that is Christ, angry when his servants sent to invite his guests, that is, preach the gospel, return with a denial from those that were bidden, for so their mannerly excuses were interpreted by Christ; yea, so angry, that he claps a fearful doom upon them; 'Not one of those invited shall taste of my supper.' God can least bear any contempt cast upon his grace. The Jews, though they had many grievous calamities befell them for their idolatrous and other sins, yet never any like that which their rejecting Christ brought upon them: under those they relented, but under this they hardened. They would not come when the supper was on the table; and therefore the cloth was drawn, and they go superless to bed, and die in their sins: while they shut the door of their hearts against Christ, this padlock, as I may call it, of judiciary impenitence is fastened to it. Christ needs take no other revenge on a soul for its refusing him, to make it miserable to the height, than to condemn such a one to have its own desire: Christ thou wilt not, Christ therefore thou shalt not, have. O unhappy soul! thou hast offers of Christ, but diest without Christ. Thou goest with thy full lading to damnation: none sink so deep in hell as those that fall into it with stumbling at Christ. That gospel which brings now good news, will, when thou shalt have a repetition sermon of it at the great day, bring the heaviest tidings with it that thy ears ever heard.

SECTION IV.—Secondly, To you who have entertained the message of the gospel. First, Rejoice at the news: glad tidings, and sad hearts, do not well together. When we see one heavy and sorrowful, we ask him what ill news he hath heard. Christian, what ill news hath Christ brought from heaven with him that makes thee walk with thy folded arms and pensive countenance? Psa. cxxxii. 16. To see a wicked man merry and jocund, or a Christian sad and dumpish, is alike uncomely. 'A feast is made for laughter,' saith Solomon, Eccles. x. 19. I am sure God intended his people's joy in the feast of the gospel: mourners were not to sit at God's table, Deut. xxvi. Truly the saint's heaviness reflects unkindly upon God himself; we do not commend his cheer, if it doth not cheer us. What saith the world? The Christian's life is but a melancholy walk. Sure, thinks the carnal wretch, it is a dry feast they sit at, where so little wine of joy is drunk. And wilt thou confirm them in this their opinion, Christian? Shall they have thy example to produce against Christ and his word, which promise peace and joy to all that will come to this feast? O, God forbid that thy conversation, wherein thou art to hold forth the word of life, to live in the eyes of the world, and which ought to be as a comment or gloss upon the word, to clear up the truth and reality of it to others; that this should

Digitized by Google

so disagree from the text as to make the gladsome tidings spoken of in it more disputed and questioned in the thoughts of the unbelieving world than before. It is an error, I confess, and that a gross one, which the Papists teach, that we cannot know the Scriptures to be the word of God, but by the testimony of the church; yet it is none to say, that a practical testimony from the saints' lives hath great authority over the consciences of men, to convince them of the truth of the gospel. Now they will believe it is good news indeed the gospel brings, when they can read it in your cheerful lives; but when they observe Christians sad with this cup of salvation in their hands, truly they suspect the wine in it is not so good as the preachers commend it to them for. Should man see all that trade to the Indies come home poorer than they went, it would be hard to persuade others to venture thither, for all the golden mountains said to be there. O Christians, let the world see you are not losers in your joy, since you have been acquainted with the gospel; give them not cause to think by your uncomfortable walking, that when they turn Christians, they must bid all joy farewell, and resolve to spend their days in a house of mourning. Secondly, Is the gospel a message of glad tidings? Do not, then, for shame, Christian, run on the world's score by taking up any of its carnal joy; thou needest not go out of God's house to be merry; here is joy enough in the glad tidings of the gospel, more than thou canst spend, though thou shouldst live at a higher rate than thou dost or canst here on earth. Abraham would not take so much as a thread or shoe-latchet from the king of Sodom, Gen. xiv., 'lest he should say that he made Abraham rich.' A Christian should deny himself of the world's joy and delights, lest they say, These Christians draw their joy out of our cistern. The channel is cut out of the Spirit of God, in which he would have his saints' joy run. 'If any be merry, let him sing psalms.' Let the subject of his mirth be spiritual; as on the other hand, 'If he be sick, let him pray,' James iii. 13: a spiritual vent is given to both affections of sorrow and joy. *Aliter ludet ganeo. aliter princeps.* A prince's recreation must not be like a ruffian's, nor a Christian's joy like the carnal man's. If ever there was need to call upon Christians to feed the lamp of their joy with spiritual fuel, holy oil, that drops from the gospel reservoir, now the time is, wherein professors do assimilate with the world in their outward bravery, junketings, fashions, pastimes, and are so kind to the flesh, in allowing of, yea, pleading so much for a carnal liberty in these things, that shews too plainly the spiritual joy to be drawn out of these wells of salvation does not satisfy them, or else they would not make up their draught from this dirty water, which was wont to be thirsted after only by those that had never drunk of Christ's cup. Oh, what is the reason that those who would pass for Christians forsake this pure wine of gospel joy, for the sophisticated stuff which this whore, the world, presents in her golden cup to them? Is it because the gladsome message of the gospel is grown stale, and so its joy (which once sparkled in the preaching of it, as generous wine doth in the cup, and cheered the hearts of believers with strong consolations), hath now lost its spirits? Or can that pure stream of spiritual joy, which hath run so long through the hearts and lives of the saints in so many generations, without mingling with the brackish water of the world's sensual pleasures, at last fall in with them, and be content to lose its own divine nature and sweetness in such a sink? O no! the gospel is the same as it was; the joy it brings as sweet and brisk, as spiritual and pure, as ever it was, and will be as long as God and Christ continue to be the same, out of whose bosom of love it first flowed and is still fed: but the professors of this gospel now are not the same with those holy men and women of primitive times. The world grows old, and men's affections with it chill and cold; we have not our taste so lively, nor our spirits so chaste and pure, as to relish the heavenly viands dished forth in the gospel. The cheer is as good as ever, but the guests are worse; we are grown debauched in our judgments, and corrupt in our principles: no wonder then if carnal in our joys. Error is a whore, it takes away the heart from Christ and his spiritual joys. The head once distempered, soon affects the heart, and by dropping the malignity of its principles upon it, poisons it with carnal affections, and carnal affections cannot fare with any other than gross and carnal joys. Here, here is the root of the misery of our times. Hath not, think you, the devil played his game cunningly among us, who, by his instruments, (transforming them into the likeness of

Digitized by Google

angels of light), first, could raise so many credulous souls into a fond expectation of higher attainments in grace and comfort from their new pretended light, than ever yet the saints were acquainted with, and at last to make them fall so low, be so reasonable, or rather unreasonable, as to accept such sensual pleasures and joys as this world can afford in full payment for all the glorious things he promised them? This I hope will make some love the gospel the more, and stick closer to it as long as they live. O Christians, bless God for the glad tidings of the gospel, and never lend an ear to him that would be telling you other news, except you mean to part with the truth to purchase a lie; yea, let it make you careful to draw all your comfort and joy from the gospel's breast. When a carnal heart would be merry, he doth not take the Bible down to read in that; he doth not go into the company of the promises, and walk in the meditation of them; it brings no joy to him to think of Christ or heaven: no, he takes down a playbook, it may be, seeks some jovial company, goes to the exchange at market, to hear what news he can meet with. Every one as his haunt lies; but still it is from the world he expects his joy. And now where lies thy road, Christian? Whither doth thy soul lead thee for thy joy? Dost not thou go to the word, and read there what Christ has done for thee on earth, and is doing for thee in heaven? Is not the throne of grace the exchange to which thou resortest for good news from that far country, heaven, where all thy estate lies, and thy best friends live? Art thou not listening what promise he will speak peace from to thy soul? If so, thou hast not thy name for nought; thou art a Christian indeed. *Qui litteris addicti sumus*, saith Erasmus, *animi lassitudinem a studiis gravioribus contractam, ab eisdem studiis, sed amœnioribus recreamus.* True students, that love their book indeed, when they have wearied their spirits with study, can recreate them again with study, by making a diversion from that which is severe and intricate to some more facile and pleasant subject. Thus the true Christian, when his spirits are worn and wasted in the severer exercises of Christianity, such as fasting and prayer, wherein he afflicts both body and soul for his sins, that he can recover them at the feast of God's love in Christ, where he sees his water turned into wine, and the tears that even now his sins covered his face withal, washed off by the blood of Christ: when his soul is struck into a fear and trembling with the consideration of the justice of God, and the terror of his threatenings and judgments for sin, then the meditation of the sweet promises of the gospel recreate and revive him; so that in the same word, where he meets with his wound, he finds his healing; where he hath his sorrow, there also he receives his joy.

CHAPTER III.

A FOURFOLD PEACE ATTRIBUTED TO THE GOSPEL, AND IN PARTICULAR, PEACE OF RECONCILIATION, WHERE IT IS PROVED THERE IS A QUARREL BETWIXT GOD AND MAN; AS ALSO THAT THE GOSPEL CAN ONLY TAKE IT UP; AND WHY GOD THUS LAID THE METHOD OF MAN'S RECOVERY SO.

Quest. 2. THE second inquiry follows, What peace is here meant that is attributed to the gospel? Peace is a comprehensive word. 'We looked for peace,' saith the prophet, 'but no good came,' Jer. viii. 15. Peace brings, and carries away again with it all good, as the sun doth light to and from the world. When Christ would to the utmost express how well he wished his disciples, he wraps up all the happiness which his large heart could wish them in this blessing of peace; 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,' John xiv. 27. Now take peace in its greatest latitude, and if not spurious, it will be found to grow upon this gospel root. So that we shall lay the conclusion in general terms.

Doct. True peace is the blessing of the gospel, and only of the gospel. This will appear in the several kinds of peace; which may be sorted into these four. First, Peace with God, which we may call peace of reconciliation. Secondly, Peace with ourselves, or peace of conscience. Thirdly, Peace with one another, or peace of love and unity. Fourthly, Peace with the other creatures, even the most hurtful, which may be called a peace of indemnity and service.

To begin where all other begin, with peace of reconciliation with God. For when man fell out with God, he fell out with himself and all the world besides

Digitized by Google

and he can never come to be at peace with these, till his peace be made with God, *Tranquillus Deus, tranquillat omnia;* the point then is,

Doct. 1. The peace of reconciliation with God is the blessing of the gospel. Three things are here to be done in prosecution of the point. First, I shall shew you that there is a quarrel between God and man. Secondly, that the gospel, and only the gospel, takes this up, and makes peace betwixt God and man. Thirdly, why God conveys this peace of reconciliation into the world in this way, and by this method.

First, There is a quarrel depending betwixt God and the sons of men. Open acts of hostility done by one nation against another, proclaim there is a war commenced. Now, such acts of hostility pass betwixt God and man: bullets fly thick to and fro on either hand. Man lets fly against God (though, against his will, he shoots short,) whole volleys of sins and impieties. The best of saints acknowledge thus much of themselves, before converting grace took them off, Tit. iii. 3; 'We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures.' Mark the last words, 'serving lusts and pleasures.' They were in pay to sin, willing to fight against God, and side with this his only enemy. Not a faculty of his soul, or member of his body, which is not in arms against him, 'The carnal mind,' saith the apostle, 'is enmity against God,' Rom. viii. 7. And if there be war in the mind, to be sure there can be no peace in the members, (inferior faculties, I mean, of the soul,) which are commanded all by it. Indeed, we are by nature worst in our best part; the enmity against God is chiefly seated in the superior faculties of the soul. As in armies, the common soldiery are wholly taken up with the booty and spoil they get by the war, without much minding one side or other; but the principal officers, especially the prince or general, go into the field full of enmity against them that oppose them; so the inferior faculties seek only satisfaction to their sensual appetite in the booty that sin affords; but the superior faculties of the mind, this comes forth more directly against God, and opposeth his sovereignty; yea, if it could lay a plot effectual to take away the life of God himself, there is enmity enough in the carnal mind to put it into execution. And as man is in arms against God, so is he against man. 'He is angry with the wicked every day; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death,' Psa. vii. 11. God hath set up his royal standard in defiance of all the sons and daughters of apostate Adam, who from his own mouth are proclaimed rebels and traitors to his crown and dignity; and as against such, he hath taken the field, as with fire and sword to be avenged on them. Yea, he gives the world sufficient testimony of his incensed wrath, by that of it which is revealed from heaven daily in the judgments executed upon sinners, and those many but of a span long, before they can shew what nature they have by actual sin, yet crushed to death by God's righteous foot, only for the viperous kind of which they come. At every door where sin sets its foot, there the wrath of God meets us. Every faculty of soul, and member of body, are used as a weapon of unrighteousness against God; so every one hath its portion of wrath, even to the tip of the tongue. As man is sinful all over, so is he cursed all over. Inside and outside, soul and body, is written all with woes and curses, so close and full, that there is not room for another to interline, or add to what God hath written. In a word, so fiery is the Lord's wrath against sinful man, that all the creatures share with him in it. Though God takes his aim at man, and levels his arrows primarily at his very heart; yet as they go, they graze the creature; God's curse blasts the whole creation, for man's sake: and so he pays him some of his misery, from the hand of those creatures which were primitively ordained to minister to him in his happy state; yea, contribute some drops to the filling of his cup. As an enraged army makes spoil and havoc of all in their enemies' land, destroys their provision, stops or poisons their waters, burns up their houses, and lets out his fury on all his hand comes at: truly thus God plagues man in every creature; not one escapes his hand. The very bread we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe in, are poisoned with the curse of God; of which they who live longest die at last. And all these are no more to hell, than the few files of men to the whole body of an army; God doth but skirmish with sinners here by some small parties of his judgments sent out, to let them know they have

Digitized by Google

an enemy alive, that observes their motions, takes the alarm their sins give him, and can be too hard for them when he shall please; but it is in hell where he falls on with his whole power. There sinners 'shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,' 2 Thess. i. 9. And so much for the first, that there is a quarrel between God and man. The second follows.

Secondly, The gospel takes this quarrel up, and only the gospel; therefore called 'the gospel of peace.' This will appear in two particulars. First, the gospel presents us with the articles of peace, which God offers graciously to treat upon with the children of men, and this, none but the gospel doth. Secondly, the gospel preached and published is the great instrument of God to effect this peace thus offered. First, The gospel presents us with the articles of peace, which God graciously offers to treat and conclude an inviolable peace upon with rebellious man. In it we have the whole method, which God laid in his own thoughts from eternity, of reconciling poor sinners to himself. The gospel, what is it, but God's heart in print? The precious promises of the gospel, what are they, but heaven's court-rolls, translated into the creature's language? in which are exposed to the view of our faith all the counsels and purposes of love and mercy, which were concluded on by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the recovery of lost man by Jesus Christ, who was sent as heaven's plenipotentiary to earth, fully empowered and enabled, not only by preaching, to treat of a peace as desired on God's part, to be concluded between God and man, but, by the purchase of his death to procure a peace, and by his Spirit to seal and ratify the same to all those, who, believing the credential letters which God sent with him in the miracles wrought by him, and especially the testimony which the Scripture gives of him, do by a faith unfeigned receive him into their souls, as their only Lord and Saviour. This is such a notion as is not to be learnt elsewhere. A deep silence we find concerning this in Aristotle and Tully. They cannot tell us how a poor sinner may be at peace with God; nothing of this to be discovered from the covenant God made with Adam. That shuts the sinner up in a dark dungeon of despair; bids him look for nothing but what the wrath of a just God can measure out to him. Thus the guilty creature is surrounded on every side, as with a deluge of wrath; no hope nor help to be heard of, till the gospel, like a dove, bring the olive branch of peace, and tells him the tide is turned, and that flood of wrath which was poured on man for his sin is now fallen into another channel, even upon Christ, who was made a curse for us, and hath not only drunk of the brook that lay in the way, and hindered our passage to God, but hath drunk it off; so that where water was, now appears dry land, a safe and fair causeway, called Heb. x. 20, 'a living way,' by which every truly repenting and believing sinner may pass without any danger, from the justice of God now appeased, into the love and favour of God. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' Rom. v. 1. We are entirely beholden to the gospel for the discovery of this secret, which the apostle solemnly acknowledgeth,' 2 Tim. i. 10; where Christ is said to 'bring life and immortality to light by the gospel.' It lay hid in the womb of God's purpose, till the gospel arose, and let us into the knowledge of it, as the light of the sun reveals to the eye what was before, but what could not be seen without its light; and therefore, it is not only called a living way, but a 'new and living way which he hath consecrated for us;' so new, that the heart of man never was acquainted with one thought of it, till the gospel opened it, according to that of Isa. xlii. 16: 'I will bring the blind by a way they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known.' Secondly, The gospel published and preached, is the great instrument of God to effect this peace. Before peace be concluded between God and the creature, both must be agreed; as God to pardon, so the sinner to accept and embrace peace upon God's own terms: but how shall this be done? The heart of man is so deeply rooted in its enmity against God, that it requires a strength to pluck up this, equal with that which tears up mountains and carries rocks from one place to another. The gospel preached is the instrument which God useth for the effecting of it, Rom. i. 16: 'I am not ashamed,' saith the apostle there, 'of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation. It is the chariot wherein the Spirit rides victoriously, when he makes

Digitized by Google

his entrance into the heart of man; called, therefore, 'the ministration of the Spirit,' 2 Cor. iii. 8. He fashions anew the heart, as he framed the world at first, with a word. This is 'the day of God's power, wherein he makes his people willing.' Power, indeed, to make those that had the seeds of war sown in their very natures against God willing to be friends with him. Unheard of power, as if the beating of a drum should carry such a charm along with its sound, to make those on the enemy's side upon the hearing of it, to throw down their arms and seek peace at his hand, against whom they even now took the field with great rage and fury; such a secret power accompanies the gospel. It strikes many times not only the sinner's sword out of his hand while it is stretched out against God, but the enmity out of his heart, and brings the stoutest rebel upon his knees, humbly to crave the benefit of the articles of peace published in the gospel. It makes sinners so pliant and tractable to the call of God in the gospel, that they on a sudden, upon the hearing of a gospel sermon, forget their own natural affections which they have had to their beloved lusts, and leap out of their embraces with indignation, lest they should keep God and them at enmity one moment longer. Now follows the third.

Quest. 3. Why doth God convey his peace of reconciliation by this channel unto the sons of men? Or, in plainer terms, Why doth God choose to reconcile poor sinners to himself by Christ? For this is the peace which the gospel proclaims, Col. i. 20: 'And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself.' And ver. 21, 22: 'And you that were sometimes alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight.'

Ans. They are too bold with God, who say, That he could not find out another way; who knows that, except God himself had told him so? Alas! how unmeet is the short line of our created understanding for such a daring attempt, as to fathom the unsearchableness of God's omnipotent wisdom! To determine what God can, and what he cannot do! But we may say, and not forget to revere the Majesty of heaven, that the wisdom of God could not have laid the method of salvation more advantageous to the exalting of his own glorious name, and his poor creatures' happiness, than in this expedient of reconciling them to himself by Christ our great peace maker. This transaction hath in it a happy temperament, to solve all the difficulties on either hand; and for its mysterious contrivance exceeds the workmanship which God put forth in making this exterior world, though that in its kind perfect, and so glorious, that the smallest creature tells its Maker to be a Deity, and puts the atheist to shame in his own conscience that will not believe so; yet I say, it exceeds this goodly frame of heaven and earth, as far as the watch itself doth the case which covers it. Indeed, God intended by this way of reconciling poor sinners to himself, to make work for angels and saints to admire the mystery of his wisdom, power and love therein to everlasting. O, when they shall all meet together in heaven, and there have the whole counsel of God unfolded to them; when they shall behold what seas were dried up, and what rocks of creature impossibilities digged through by the omnipotent wisdom and love of God, before a sinner's peace could be obtained, and then behold the work, notwithstanding all this, effected and brought to a happy perfection; O, how will they be swallowed up in adoring the abyss of his wisdom, who laid the platform of all this according to the eternal counsel of his own will! Surely the sun doth not so much exceed the strength of our mortal eyes, as the glory of this will their understandings from ever fully comprehending it. This is the piece which God drew on purpose, for its rare workmanship, to beautify heaven itself; when Christ returned to heaven, he carried none of this world's rarities with him: not its silver and gold; not crowns and diadems, which here men venture their lives, yea, part with their souls so prodigally for. Alas! what are these and the whole pride and gallantry of this world to heaven? That in which it glories most, suits heaven no better than the beggar's dish and scraps do a prince's table; or the patched tattered coat of the one the wardrobe of the other. No, the Lord Christ came on a higher design than this to earth: the enterprise he undertook to achieve, was to negotiate, yea, effect a peace between God and

Digitized by Google

his rebel-creature man, that had by his revolt incurred his just wrath and vengeance: this was a work that became God himself so well to engage in, that he thought none high and worthy enough to be trusted with transacting it beneath his only Son, who stayed here but while he had brought his negotiation to a happy period, and then carried the joyful tidings of its being finished back with him to heaven, which made his return infinitely welcome to his Father, and all the glorious inhabitants of heaven his attendants.

CHAPTER IV.

A MORE PARTICULAR ACCOUNT WHY GOD RECONCILED SINNERS TO HIMSELF BY CHRIST.

But I shall proceed to give some more particular answer to the question propounded.

Section I.—First, God takes this method of reconciling sinners to himself by Christ, that he might give the deepest testimony of his perfect hatred to sin in that very act wherein he expresseth the highest love and mercy to sinners. No act of mercy and love, like that of pardoning sin. To receive a reconciled sinner into heaven is not so great an advance, as to take a rebel into a state of favour and reconciliation. The terms here are infinitely wider; there is reason to expect the one, none to look for the other. It is pure mercy to pardon, but truth, being pardoned, to save. When God puts forth this very act, he will have the creature see his hatred to sin, written upon the face of that love he shews to the sinner. And truly this was but needful, if we consider how hard it is for our corrupt hearts to conceive of God's mercy, without some dishonourable reflection upon his holiness. 'I kept silence,' saith God, Psa. l. And what inference doth the wicked draw from thence? 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself;' that is, Thou thoughtest I loved sin as well as thyself. Now, if so plain and easy a text as God's forbearing mercy be wrested, and a false gloss so repugnant, not only to the end of God therein, but to the holy nature of God, be put upon it—how much more subject is forgiving mercy, that is so far superlative to that, and infinitely more luscious to the sinner's palate, to be abused! Some men gaze so long on this pleasing object, that they are unwilling to look off, and see any other attribute in God. Now, in this way of reconciling himself to sinners by Christ, he hath given such an argument to convince sinners, that he is an implacable hater of sin, as hath not its fellow. It is true, every threat in the Bible tells us, that sin finds no favour in God's heart; the guilty consciences of men, that haunt them home, and follow them into their own bosoms, continually yelling and crying damnation in their ears; the remarkable judgments, which now and then take hold of sinners in this world, and much more the furnace which is heating for them in another world, shew abundantly how hot and burning God's wrath is against sin. But when we see him run upon his Son, and lay the envenomed knife of his wrath to his throat, yea, thrust it into his very heart, and there leave it for all the supplications and prayers, which, in his bitter agonies, he offered up to his Father with strong crying and tears, without the least sparing of him, till he had forced his life, in a throng of sad groans and sighs, out of his body, and thereby paid justice the full debt, which he had as man's surety undertook to discharge: this, this, I say, doth give us a greater advantage to conceive of God's hatred to sin, than if we could stand in a place, to see what entertainment the damned find in hell, and at once behold all the torments they endure. Alas! their backs are not broad enough to bear the whole weight of God's wrath at once, it being infinite, and they finite; which, if they could, we should not find them lying in that prison for non-payment. But behold one here, who had the whole curse of sin at once upon his back. Indeed, their sufferings are infinite, extensive, because everlasting: but his were infinite, intensive; he paid in one sum, what they shall be ever paying, and yet never come to the last farthing. 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him,' Isa. liii. 5: 'He hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,' ver. 6; or, He hath made the iniquity of us all to meet in him; the whole curse met in him, as all streams do in the sea. A virtual collection of all the threatenings denounced against sin, and all laid on him. And now, take but one step more, and consider in

Digitized by Google

how near relation Christ stood to God, as also the infinite and unspeakable love with which it was filled, and mutually endeared on each hand; and this at the very same time, when he ascended the stage to act a bloody tragedy; and I think that you are at the highest step the word of God can lead you, to ascend by into the meditation of this subject. Should you see a father that has but one only son, and can have no more, send him his mittimus to prison, come into court himself, and sit judge upon his life; with his own lips pass sentence of death upon him, and order that it be executed with the most exquisite torments that may be; yea, to go to the place himself, and with his own eyes, and those not full of water, as mourning for his death, but full of fire and fury; yea, a countenance every way so set, as might tell all that see it, the man took pleasure in his child's death: you would say, Surely he bitterly hates his son, or the sin his son hath committed. This you see in God the Father, towards his Son; it was he more than men or devils, that procured his death. Christ took notice of this, that the warrant for his death had his Father's hand and seal to it: 'Shall I not drink of the cup my Father gives me?' Yea, he stands by and rejoices in it; his blood was the 'wine that made glad the heart of God;' 'it pleased the Lord to bruise him,' Isa. liii. 10. When God corrects a saint, he does it, in a manner, unwillingly; but when Christ suffers, it pleases him; and this not from want of love in his heart to Christ, nor that any disobedience in Christ had hardened his Father's heart against him, for he never displeased him, but from the hatred he had to sin, and zeal to exalt his mercy towards sinners, by satisfying his justice on his Son.

SECTION II.—Secondly, He effected our peace by Christ, that he might for ever hide pride from his saints' eyes. Pride was the stone on which both angels and man stumbled and fell. In man's recovery, therefore, he will roll that stone as far as may be out of the way; he will lay that knife aside with which man did himself the mischief: and that he may do this, he transacts the whole business by Christ for them. Man's project was to cut off the entail of his obedience to God, and set up for himself, as a free and absolute prince, without depending upon his Maker. A strange plot! for, to effect this, he must first have thrown away that being which God gave him, and by a self-creation, if such a thing had been possible, have bestowed a new one upon himself; then, indeed, and not till then, he might have had his will. But alas! his pride to be what he could not, lost him what he had, and still might have, enjoyed; yet how foolish soever it now appears, and infeasible, that was the plot pride had laid in man's heart. Now God, to preserve his children from all future assaults and batteries of hell at this door, chose such a way of reconciling and saving them, that when the prince of the world comes to tempt them to pride, he should find nothing in them to give the least countenance or colour to such a motion; so that, of all sins, pride is such a one as we may wonder how it should grow, for it hath no other root to bear it up, but what is found in man's dreaming fancy and imagination. It grows, as sometimes we shall see a mushroom, or moss among stones, where little or no soil is for its root to take hold of. God in this gospel way of reconciling sinners by Christ, makes him fetch all from without doors. Wilt thou, poor soul, have peace with God? thou must not have it from thine own penance for thy sins: 'The chastisement of our peace was upon him,' Isa. liii. 5. O know thou art not thy own peace-maker; that is Christ's name, who did that work, Eph. ii. 14: 'For he is our peace, who hath made both one,' Jew and Gentile one with God, and one with one another. Wouldst thou be righteous? then thou must not appear before God in thine own clothes; it is another's righteousness not thine own, that is provided for thee: 'Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness,' Isa. xlv. 24. In a word, wouldst thou ever have a right in heaven's glory, thy penny is not good coin to purchase it with; the price must not come out of thy purse, but Christ's heart; and, therefore, as it is called the 'purchased possession,' in regard of Christ, because he obtained it for us with a great sum, not silver and gold, but his precious blood; so 'an inheritance,' in regard of us, because it descends upon us, as freely as the father's estate on his child, Eph. i. 14. And why all this, but that the lofty looks of man may be humbled, and the haughtiness of man should be bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted in the day of our salvation. The manna is expounded, by Christ himself, to be a type of him,

Digitized by Google

John vi. 32: 'The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world.' Now, observe, wherefore God chose that way of feeding them in the wilderness, Deut. viii. 16: 'Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee.' But wherein lay this great humbling of them? Were they not shrewdly humbled, think you, to be fed with a dainty dish, which had God for its cook, and is called 'angels' food,' for its delicacy? Psa. lxxviii. 25; such, that if they needed any repast, might well suit their table. I answer, it was not the meanness of the fare, but the manner of having it, which God intended should humble them. Man is proud, and loves to be his own purveyor, and not stand to another's allowance: the same feast, sent in by the charity and bounty of another, will not go down so well with his high stomach, as when it is provided at his own cost and charges; he had rather have the honour of keeping his own house, though mean, than to live higher upon the alms and allowance of another's charity. This made them wish themselves at their onions in their own gardens in Egypt, and flesh-pots there, which, though they were grosser diet, liked them better, because bought with their own penny.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, That it might be a peace, with the greatest advantage possible: that God and man might meet again on better terms, by this pacification, than when Adam stood in all his primitive glory. God, no doubt, would not have set the beauty of his first workmanship to be so defaced by sin, had he not meant to have reared a more magnificent structure out of its ruins. Now, God intending to print man's happiness in the second edition, with a fairer character than at the first, he employs Christ in the work, as the only fit instrument to accomplish so great a design; Christ himself tells us as much, John x. 10: 'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.' His coming was not to give those who were dead and damned, bare peace, naked life, but more abundantly than ever man had them before the breach. It was Christ in the second temple, who filled it with a glory superlative to the first; Christ in the second creation of man, that lifts his head above his first state in happiness. As Adam was a pattern to all his seed, what he was in his innocent state, that should they all have been, if sin had not altered the scene; so Christ is a pattern to all his seed of that glory which they shall be clothed with; 1 John iii. 2: 'We are now the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know, when he appears, we shall be like him,' that is, 'our vile bodies like his body, glorious,' as the apostle hath it, Phil. iii.; and our souls also like his glorious soul. Now, by how much our nature in Christ is more glorious than it was in Adam, by so much the taste of a reconciled sinner surpasseth Adam's first condition. Some little discovery whereof, take in two particulars. First, The reconciled sinner hath the advantage of Adam in his union to God. Secondly, In his communion with God.

First, In his union to God. And that, first, as it is nearer; secondly, as it is stronger. First, It is nearer; because God and man make one person in Christ. This is such a mystery, as was not heard of by Adam, in all his glory; he, indeed, was in league of love and friendship with God, and that was the best jewel in his crown; but he could lay no claim to such kindred and consanguinity, as now, with reverence be it spoken, the reconciled soul can with God. This comes in by the marriage of the Divine nature with the human, in the person of Christ, which personal union is the foundation of another, a mystical union betwixt Christ and the person of every believer; and this is so near a union, that as by the union of the Divine nature and human, there is one person, so also, by this mystical union, the saints and their Head make one Christ: 'For, as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ,' 1 Cor. xii. 12. *Ecclesia est Christus explicatus;* the church is nothing but Christ displayed. Who can speak what an advance this is to the human nature in general, and to the persons of believers in especial? such a one, as it leaves not only Adam, but angels beneath a reconciled sinner, in this respect. Adam at first was made but little lower than the angels; but by this pair of unions, God hath set the reconciled soul more than a little above them both; for Christ, by taking on him, not the nature of angels, though the more ancient and noble house, but the

Digitized by Google

seed of Abraham, made the elder serve the younger; even angels themselves minister to the meanest saint, as unto their master's heir, Heb. i. 14. Secondly, As the union is nearer, so it is stronger; therefore stronger, because nearer; the closer stones stand together, the stronger the building. The union betwixt God and Adam in the first covenant, was not so near but Adam might fall, and yet God's glory stand entire and unshaken; but the union now is so close and strong betwixt Christ and his saints, that Christ cannot be Christ without his members: 'Because I live,' saith Christ, 'ye shall live also,' John xiv. 19; implying that their life was bound up in his, and it was as easy for him to be turned out of heaven, as for them to be kept out, Eph. i. 23. The church is called there, Christ's body, 'the fulness of him that filleth all in all.' A body is not full, if it hath not every member and joint, though never so little, and them in their fulness too. The saint's grace is Christ's glory, 2 Cor. viii. 23; and though his essential glory as God receives no filling from his saints or their graces, yet consider him in his mediatorship, as head of his church; so Christ's glory is daily filling, as the elect are called in daily, and as those that are called in grow up to their appointed stature. Christ hath not his fulness, till the saints have their perfection and complement of grace in heaven's glory.

Secondly, In his communion with God; the nearer (we use to say) the dearer. Communion results from union; if the union be nearer and stronger between a reconciled soul and God than Adam's was, his communion must needs be sweeter and fuller. Why else is the communion of husband and wife fuller than of friend and friend, but because the union is closer? God converseth with Adam as a friend with his friend and ally; but with the reconciled soul as a husband with his wife. 'Thy Maker is thy husband,' Isa. xiv. 5.

There is a double sweetness peculiar to the reconciled sinner's communion with God. First, There is in Christ a foundation laid for greater familiarity with God, than Adam was at first capable of. He, indeed, was the son of God, yet he was kept at a farther distance, and treated with more state and majesty from God, than now the reconciled soul is; for though he was the son of God by creation, yet the Son of God was not then the Son of man by incarnation; and at this door comes in the believer's sweetest familiarity with God: the Christian cannot lift up now an eye of faith to God, but he sees his own nature standing upon the throne by him, in the person of Christ. And if the sight of Joseph at Pharaoh's right hand, in court favour and honour, sent the patriarchs home with such joyful news to their aged father, what a ravishing message of joy must faith carry then to the soul of a reconciled sinner, when it comes in (after some vision of love in an ordinance) and saith, Cheer up, O my soul, I see Jesus Christ, thy near kinsman, at God's right hand in glory, to whom all power is given, in heaven and earth; fear not, he is so nigh in blood to thee, that he cannot be unmindful of thee, except he should do what were unnatural in itself, that is, hide himself from his own flesh. The lower a prince stoops to the meanest of his subjects, the more familiar he makes himself to his subjects. It was a wonderful condescension in the great God, who can have no compeer, first to make man, and then enter into so friendly a league and covenant with him. This God doth now with every reconciled soul, and that enriched with so many astonishing circumstances of condescending grace, as must needs speak the way of the believer's access to God more familiar. God doth, in this second and new alliance with his poor creature, descend his throne, exchange his majestic robes of glory for the rags of man's frail flesh; he leaves his palace to live for a time in his creature's humble cottage, and there not only familiarly converses with him, but, which is stranger, ministers to him; yea, which is more than all these, he surrenders himself up to endure all manner of indignities, from his sorry creature's hand. And when this his coarse entertainment is done, back he posts to heaven, not to complain to his Father, how he hath been abused here below, and raise heaven's power against those that had so ill-treated him, but to make ready heaven's palace for the reception of those who had thus abused him, and now will but accept of his grace. And lest these, yet lef on earth, should fear his reassumed royalty and majesty, in heaven's glory would make some alteration with their affairs in his heart; to give them, therefore, a constant demonstration, that he would be the same in the height of his honour, that he was in the depth of his abasement, he goes back in the same

Digitized by Google

clothes, he had borrowed of their nature, to wear them on the throne, in all his glory, only some princely cost bestowed, to put them into the fashion of that heavenly kingdom, and make them suit with his glorified state; giving them a pattern by this, what their own vile bodies, now so dishonourable, shall be made another day. Now, none of all those circumstances were found in God's first administration to Adam, and therefore the more familiar. Secondly, There is the sweetness of pardoning mercy, and the bleeding love of Christ, who, by his death, purchased it for him, to be tasted in the reconciled soul's communion with God. This sugar Adam had not in his cup. He knew what the love of a giving God meant; but was stranger to the mercy of a forgiving God. The reconciled soul experiences both. The love of a father, more than ordinarily kind, is a great comfort to a dutiful child—one that never displeased his father; but it carries no such wonder in it to our thoughts, as the compassion and melting bowels of a father towards a rebellious child doth; and certainly the prodigal child, that is received again into his father's embraces, hath the advantage for loving his father, more than his brother that never came under his father's displeasure. . O this pardoning mercy, and the love of Christ that procured it! they are the most spacious and fruitful heads, for a gracious soul to enlarge his sweetest meditations upon here on earth; but who can conceive what ravishing music glorified saints will make, in running division on this sweet note? I am sure the song their harps are tuned unto is the 'song of the Lamb,' Rev. xv. 2, 3. The saints' finished happiness in heaven's glory is a composition of all the rare ingredients possible, so tempered by the wise hand of God, that as none could well be spared, so not the taste of any one shall be lost in another; but this of pardoning mercy, and the stupendous love and wisdom of God through Christ therein, shall, as I may so say, give a sweet relish to all, and be tasted above all the rest.

CHAPTER V.

AN EXHORTATION TO EMBRACE THIS PEACE OF RECONCILIATION, OFFERED IN THE GOSPEL.

Use 1. Let it provoke every one to labour to get an interest in this peace of reconciliation with God, which the gospel brings. Peace with God! sure it is worth the sinner's having; or else the angels were ill employed when they welcomed the tidings thereof into the world, at our Saviour's birth, with such acclamations of joy, 'Glory to God, on earth peace,' Luke ii. 14; yea, Christ himself was deceived in his purchase; who, if a sinner's peace with God be not of high price and value, hath little to shew for the effusion of his heart-blood, which he thought well spent to gain this. But this we cannot believe; and yet to see how freely God offers peace and pardon to the sons of men, through Christ, and how coy, yea, sullen and cross they are to the motion, one that does not well know them both, God's infinite goodness, and wretched man's horrible baseness, might be ready to think it some low-prized ware, which lay upon God's hands; and this to be the cause why God is so earnest to put it off, and man so loth to take it off his hands. Ah, poor deluded wretches! who is the wicked counsellor that hardens your hearts, from embracing your own mercies? None, sure but a devil can hate God and you so much. And hath he sped so well in his own quarrel against God, that he should be hearkened to by thee, poor sinner? Can he give thee armour that will resist God's bullets? how then is it that he is so unkind to himself, as to let them lie in his own bosom, to his unspeakable torment? or will he lend thee any pity when thou hast, by his advice, undone thyself? Alas! no more than the cruel wolf doth the silly sheep, when he hath sucked her blood, and torn her in pieces. Think, and think again, poor sinner, what answer thou meanest to send to heaven, before God calls his ambassadors home, and the treaty break up, never to be renewed again. And that thou mayest not want some seasonable matter for thy musing thoughts to enlarge upon this subject, let me desire thee to entreat with thy own heart upon these four heads.

First, Consider what it is that stands before thee in offer. Secondly, Who it is that offers it. Thirdly, How he offers it. Fourthly, What thou dost when thou refusest it.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—First, Consider what it is that is offered thee, 'Peace with God.' A thing so indispensable, thou canst not have less; and so comprehensive, thou needest have no more than this, and what cometh with it, to make thee truly, fully happy; of all the variety of enjoyments with which it is possible thy table can be spread, this is a dish that can least be spared; take away peace, and that but of an inferior nature, outward peace, and the feast is spoiled, though it be on a prince's table. David's children had little stomach to their royal dinner, when one of them was slain that sat at the board with them. And what taste can you have in all your junkets, while God is in array against you, many sinners slain before your eye by God's judgments, and the same sword that hath let out their blood at thy throat while the meat is in thy mouth? Methinks your sweet morsels should stick in your throat, and hardly get down, while you muse on those things. O sinner! is not this as a toad swelling at the bottom of thy most sweetly sugared cup, that the controversy yet depends between God and thee; thy sins are unpardoned, and thou a dead, damned creature, however, merry thou art for the present in thy prison? Would you not wonder to see a man at his sport, hunting or hawking, and one should tell you this man is to be hanged to-morrow? Truly God is more merciful to thee than thou canst promise thyself, if he stay the execution till another day. I confess when I meet a man whose life proclaims him an unreconciled sinner, and see him spruce up himself in his fine clothes, entertain himself with the joy of his children, estate, honour, or the like, in this life; it administers matter of astonishment to me what such a one thinks of God or himself. Canst thou think it is long thou shalt sit at this fire of thorns thou hast kindled, and not God fire thee? Must it needs provoke a creditor to see his debtor live high, and go gaily all at his cost, and all the while never think of getting out of his debt, or make his peace with him? much more doth it God, to see sinners spend upon his bounty, lead joyful, jovial lives in the abundance of outward enjoyments he lends them, but take no thought of making peace with him in whose debt-book they are so deep in arrears. What folly had it been for the Jews, when Ahasuerus had sealed the warrant for their destruction, to have gone and painted their houses, planted their fields, and let out their hearts in the enjoyment of their estates, without taking care in the first place to get that bloody decree reversed? a worse sort art thou that dost all these, while thou carriest the sentence of death from God's mouth about thee in thy own conscience. Sir Thomas More, when in the Tower, would not so much as trim himself, saying, 'There was a controversy between the king and him for his head, and till that was at a happy end, he would be at no cost about it.' Skim off the froth of his wit, and you may make a solemn use of it. Certainly all the cost you bestow on yourselves, to make your lives pleasurable and joyous to you, is mere folly till it be decided what will become of the suit between God and you, not for your heads, but souls, yea souls and bodies, whether for heaven or hell. O were it not thy wisest course to begin with making thy peace, and then thou mayest soon lead a happy life. We say, 'He that gets out of debt grows rich.' I am sure the reconciled soul cannot be poor. As soon as the peace is concluded, a free trade is open between God and the soul. If once pardoned, thou mayest sail to any port that lies in God's dominions, and be welcome; all the promises stand open with their rich treasure; take in, poor soul, full lading of all the precious things they afford, even as much as thy faith can bear, and none shall hinder thee. As a man may draw the wine of a whole vessel through one tap, so faith may draw the comfort of all the covenant out of this one promise of reconciliation. If reconciled, then the door is open to communion with God in all his ordinances. God and thou, being agreed, may now walk together; whereas before thou couldst not look into God's presence, but his heart rose against thee, as one at the sight of his enemy, ready to draw upon thee with his judgments. 'The smith,' we say, 'and his penny, both are black;' so wert thou, with all thy duties and performances, while unreconciled in his eye; but now thy voice is sweet, and countenance comely.' All the attributes of God, thy ally, are thine; 'his horses and chariots are thine,' as Jehoshaphat told Ahab. Whenever any enemy puts thee in fear you know where to find a friend that will take part with thee; all his providences, though, like bees, they fly some this way and some that, yea, one contrary to

Digitized by Google

another, as thou thinkest impossible to trace them, yet they are all at work for thee, and thy soul is the hive wherein they will unlade the sweet fruit of all their labour, though possibly it may be night, the evening of thy days, before thou findest it. In a word, if reconciled, thou standest next to heaven. Whom he justifies, them he glorifies,' Rom. viii. 30; thou art sure to be there as soon as death rends the veil of thy flesh, which is all that interposeth between thee and it.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Consider who it is that offers peace to thee,—the great God; and it is hard to say which speaks the greatest wonder, God to offer, or thee to refuse what he offers. We marvel not to see the undutiful child on his knees, labouring to soften his father's heart with his tears, which he hath hardened against him with his rebellion; nor a condemned traitor prostrate at his prince's foot, begging for his life, now forfeited to the justice of the law; but it is something strange to see the father become suppliant to his child; more for the traitor to open his dungeon door, and find his prince standing there, and that upon no other errand than to desire him to accept of a pardon. And yet self-love may be the great motive for this seeming self-denial. The parent doth but love himself when he steps below his place to gain his child, that carries so much of its parent's life about him. And such necessity of state there is sometimes, that great princes are forced to stoop to the meanest, yea, worst of their subjects. A prince's safety may be so intimately concerned in a traitor's life that he cannot cut off his head without imminent danger to the crown which stands upon his own. But none of these straits forced God to entertain thoughts of peace to his poor creature; no, they are the birth of free condescending love. And now think again, sinner, before the great God hath a denial from thee: if a neighbour, the poorest in the town, and he one that hath done thee wrong, and not received it from thee, comes to thee, and desires peace, shouldst thou reject the motion, would not thy conscience reproach thee to thy dying day? How then wilt thou endure to look God or conscience in the face, if thou refusest peace at God's hands; that doth not treat like men when their sword is broken and they cannot fight, but when he hath absolute power over thy life, which is ever in his hands, yea, a God that hath received the wrong, and never did thee any: yea, should have done thee none if he had long before this hanged thee up in chains of darkness among the damned?

SECTION III.—Thirdly, Consider how God offers thee peace. First, He doth it sincerely; he covers not fraud under a treaty of peace. Among men there hath been horrible juggling in this case. The flag of peace is oft hung out only to draw them within the reach of their dagger, which is ready to smite them, as Joab did Abner, under the fifth rib. In all the civil wars of France, the poor Protestants found peace more costly to them than war; they beat the Papists in the field, when open enemies, but were betrayed by them in the chamber, when false friends. But for thy comfort know, it is a God of truth thou treatest with: never did he shed the blood of war in peace, or give a soul to the sword of his wrath after quarter taken and peace given. If we confess, he is just and faithful to forgive; his promises are not yea and nay, like the devil's who lays them so that he may have the credit both ways: no the very heart of God may be seen as through a crystal window in the promise,—they are all Yea and Amen in Christ,' 2 Cor. i. 20.

Secondly, He offers peace affectionately; his heart is deeply engaged in the tenders of mercy to poor sinners, which will appear, First, in his contriving a way for reconciling sinners to himself. What men strongly desire, they stretch their wits to the utmost how to accomplish. 'The liberal man deviseth liberal things.' Isaiah xxxii. 8. It shews the heart exceeding large in charity, when a man shall sit down and study how he may find out ways for the exercise of his charity; whereas most men, alas, beat their brains how they may save their purses, and escape with giving as little as may be to the poor. O, what a rare invention hath God found out for shewing mercy! which hath so many mysterious passages in it, that angels themselves are put hither to school, that by studying this mystery of God's reconciling sinners to himself by Christ, they might 'know the manifold wisdom of God,' Ephes. iii. 10. Secondly, By the early discovery he made of this to the sons of men. That prince might well be admired for his merciful heart, if any history could shew such a one ever to have

Digitized by Google

swayed sceptre in the world, which I think it cannot, who, upon some horrid treason plotted against his crown and royal person, and that by one obliged to him with the highest favours possible, could yet not only find in his heart to pardon the rebel, but also stoop so far as to be himself the messenger that should carry the news of this his gracious purpose to the traitor in prison, before ever he relented or had it in his thought to sue for his mercy, and this the same day in which the villainous attempt was made, that the poor wretch might not languish so much as one night under the horror of his despairing thoughts; certainly such a prince would pass for a nonsuch in mercy among the sons of men. How then must our thoughts be quite swallowed up into an admiration of this stupendous act of mercy which the great God expressed to fallen man, wherein he did all this for his rebel creature! for no sooner had man broke the peace, and taken up rebellious arms against his Maker, but the Lord's heart relented towards him, and could not let the sun go down in his wrath against him, but must in the very same day that he sinned let him hear of a Saviour, by preaching peace to him 'in the seed of the woman,' Gen. ii. 15. Little did Adam think God had such a message in his mouth for him when he first heard him coming towards him, and for fear ran his head into a bush, meditating a flight from him, if he had known whither to have gone. O, that 'Adam, where art thou?' sounded, no doubt, in his guilty ears like the voice of an avenging God, calling him, a malefactor, to execution; but it proved the voice of a gracious God coming, not to meet man in his way returning to him, but to seek him out who had lost all thoughts of him, that he might give some ease to his own gracious heart, now full of mercy to his poor creature, by disclosing to him the purposes of grace which he had there conceived towards him. Surely his heart was very full, or else this would not have burst out so soon.

Thirdly, The great ordinance of the gospel ministry, which God hath set up in the church, on purpose to treat with sinners upon a peace, speaks his deep affection to the work. One would have thought it had been enough to print his thoughts and purposes of mercy in the Scripture, though he had done no more. Princes, when they put out a statute or a law, expect all their subjects should inquire after it; and do not send one to every town, whose office shall be to give notice thereof, and persuade people to submit to it; yet this the great God doth. What is the minister's work from one end of the year to the other, but to beseech sinners to be reconciled to God? And in this observe, First, The persons he sends to preach. Not angels, foreigners to our nature, who though they wish us well, yet are not so intimately concerned in man's fall as to give them the advantage of preaching with those melting bowels, that God would have them filled with, who go on this errand, No, he sends men, with whom we may converse familiarly, creatures of like passions, whose nature puts them under the same depravation, temptation, and condemnation, with ourselves; who can, from the acquaintance they have with their own hearts, tell us the baseness of ours; from the fire of God's wrath which hath scorched them for their sins, tell us the desert of ours, and danger we are in by reason of them; as also from the sweet sense that the taste of God's love in Christ hath left on their souls, can commend the cheer and feast they invite us to upon their own knowledge. Did not God, think you, desire good speed to his embassage, when he choose such to carry it? Secondly, Observe the qualifications required in those he employs as ambassadors to offer peace to sinners, 2 Tim. ii. 24: 'The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.' O how careful is God that nothing should be in the preacher to prejudice the sinner's judgment, or harden his heart against the offer of his grace! If the servant be proud and hasty, how shall they know that the master is meek and patient? God would have them do nothing to make the breach wider, or hinder a happy close between him and them. Indeed he that will take the bird, must not scare it. A froward, peevish messenger, is no friend to him that sends him. Sinners are not pelted into Christ with stones of hard provoking language, but wooed into Christ by heart-melting exhortations. Thirdly, Look into the commission God gives his ambassadors, and still his heart appears in the business, whether you consider the largeness of it on the one hand, or the strictness of it on the other. First, the largeness of it, 'Go and preach,' saith Christ, 'the gospel to

Digitized by Google

every creature.' Make no difference, rich or poor; great sinners or little, old sinners or young; offer peace to all that will but repent and believe; bid as many come as will, here is room for all that come. Again, the strictness of it on the other hand. O what a solemn charge have they to deliver their message faithfully! Paul trembles at the thoughts of loitering: 'Woe unto me if I preach not!' What an argument doth Christ use, fetched from his very heart, to persuade Peter to be careful: 'If thou lovest me, feed my sheep.' As if he had said, Peter, thou now art in tears for thy cowardice in denying me, thou hast yet one way left, for all that unkindness, to demonstrate thy love to me, and that is by feeding my sheep: do this, and trouble not thyself for that. Christ shews more care of his sheep than of himself. Fourthly, The joy God expresseth when poor sinners come into the offer of peace. Joy is the highest testimony that can be given to our complacency in any thing or person; love is to joy as fuel to the fire: if love lay little fuel of desires on the heart, then the flame of joy that comes thence will not be great. Now God's joy is great in pardoning poor sinners that come in, therefore his affection great in the offer thereof. It is made the very motive that prevails with God to pardon sinners, 'Because he delighteth in mercy,' Micah vii. 18: 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, for he delighteth in mercy.' God doth all this, 'because he delighteth in mercy.' Ask why the angler stands all night with his line in the river; he will tell you, because he delights in the sport. Well, you now know the reason why God stands so long waiting on sinners, months, years, preaching to them; it is that he may be gracious in pardoning them, and in that act delight himself. Princes very often pardon traitors, to please others more than themselves, or else it would never be done; but God doth it chiefly to delight and glad his own merciful heart. Hence, the business Christ came about, which was no other but to reconcile sinners to God, it is called 'the pleasure of the Lord,' Isa. liii. 10. The Lord takes such joy and pleasure in this, that whereas other fathers, whose love to their children sinks infinitely beneath any comparison with the love of God to Christ, mourn at the death of their children, (and most of all when violent and bloody,) God takes content in his Son's death; yea, had the chief hand in procuring of it, and that with infinite complacency: 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him.' And what joy could God take in his Son's death, but as it made way for him and his poor creatures that were fallen out, and at open war one against another, to fall in again by a happy accord? And now speak, O sinner, if God doth so affectionately desire to be reconciled with thee, doth it not much more behove thee to embrace the peace than it doth him to offer it?

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, There is but one thing more I would desire thee, sinner, to consider, and then I leave thee to thy own choice. Consider what thou dost when thou refusest peace with God. Determinations of war or peace use to be the result of the most grave counsels and mature deliberations possible. Think and think again what thou dost, before thou breakest off the treaty of peace, lest thou makest work for repentance when it will be bootless. But lest thou shouldst not be so faithful to God and thy own soul, as to give thy conscience liberty to speak freely in this matter, I shall do it for thee, and tell thee what thou dost when thou rejectest peace. Thou justifiest thy former hostilities against God, and declarest that thou wilt vouch what thou hast done, let God right himself as well as he can. He that refuseth a pardon, either denieth he hath done wrong, or which is worse, stands to defend it: thou hadst as good say thou desirest not to be friends with God, but hast a mind to perpetuate the feud between God and thee; like Hamilcar, who was such an enemy to Rome, that when he died he made his son Hannibal swear to his hatred against them. Is it not enough thou hast fought so many battles on earth against thy Maker, but wilt thou keep the quarrel up in another world also, where there is no more possibility to put an end to it than to eternity itself? Thou throwest the greatest scorn upon God that it is possible for a creature to do; as if God's love and hatred were such inconsiderable things that they need not, when cast into the scale of thy thoughts, preponderate thee either way, the one to move thy desire, or the other thy fear. In a word, thou consentest to thy own damnation, and desperately flingest thyself into the mouth of God's flaming wrath, which gapes

Digitized by Google

in the threatening upon thee. God is under an oath to procure thy destruction, if thou diest in this mind, which God forbid. Death is the trap-door which will let thee down to hell's dungeon, and when once thou art there thou art where thou wilt have space enough to weep over thy past folly, though here thou hast neither mind nor leisure to make God thy friend. The very thoughts of those offers of peace which once thou hadst (but no heart to embrace them) will be like so much salt and vinegar, with which thy accusing conscience will be continually basting thee, as thou liest roaring in hell-fire, to make thy torment the more intolerable. I know this language grates in the sinner's ears, but not so ill as the gnashing of the sinner's own teeth will in hell. I have read of a foolish, I may say cruel, law among the Lacedemonians, that none should tell his neighbour any ill news befallen him, but every one should be left in process of time to find it out themselves. Many among us, I think, would be content if there were such a law, that might tie up minister's mouths from scaring them with their sins, and the miseries that attend their unreconciled state. The most are more careful to run from the discourse of their misery, than to get out of the danger of it; are more offended with the talk of hell, than troubled for that sinful state that shall bring them thither. But, alas! when then shall we shew our love to the souls of sinners if not now? seeing that in hell there remains no more offices of love to be done for them. Hell is a pest-house, that we may not write so much on the door of it as, 'Lord have mercy upon them' that are in it; nay, they who now pray for their salvation, and weep over their condition, must then with Christ vote for their damnation, and rejoice in it, though they be their own fathers, husbands, and wives they see there. O now bethink yourselves, before the heart of God and man be hardened against you.

CHAPTER VI.

FOUR DIRECTIONS BY WAY OF COUNSEL TO SINNERS, YET IN AN UNRECONCILED STATE, HOW THEY MAY BE AT PEACE WITH GOD.

Quest. But how may a poor sinner be at peace with God?

Section I.—*Ans.* First, See and be sensible of the feud and enmity, that at present stands betwixt God and thee. First, As to the reality of the thing that there is indeed a quarrel which God hath against thee; wherever thou goest, an angry God is at thy back, and his wrath, like a heavy cloud, hangs full of curses over thy head, ready every moment to empty them upon it. There is need of pressing this; for though it is ordinary for men to confess themselves sinners, yet most are loth to disparage their state so far as to rank themselves among the enemies of God: no, they hope God and they are good friends, for all this. Like thieves, they will confess some little matter, but they will have a care of letting fall anything that may hazard their necks: sinner is a favourable word; who lives and sins not? that they will grant; but to be in a state of enmity, and under the wrath of God, this scares them too much and brings them too near the sight of the gallows, the seat of hell, which are due to that state; and, therefore, when pressed thus far, as the Jews desired Rabshakeh, when he terrified them with the dreadful things that would befall them, if they stood out against the king his master, 'that he would not speak in the Jews' language in the hearing of the people,' Isa. xxxvi. 11, for fear of affrighting them, but in a foreign tongue; so sinners desire those that deal plainly with them, that they would not speak so broad in the hearing of their conscience, which they are afraid should know the worst. But if thou lovest thy own soul, make a true representation of thy state to thyself. O what folly is it for a man to lose his cause, by concealing the badness of it. Secondly, Labour to bring thyself under the sense of thy miserable condition, as thou art. Hadst thou the empire of the world, and all nations creeping to thy foot, as once the beasts did to Adam, and a lease as long as Methuselah's life twice told to enjoy it in, without the interposition of one cloud all the while to darken the glory of this thy royalty; yet, supposing thee to be one to whom God is an enemy, I would choose to be the worm under thy foot, the toad in the ditch, sooner than thy miserable self in thy palace. One thought of thy approaching death and eternal misery, in store for thee, will blunt the edge of all thy present happiness. This, this makes the great ones of the world, indeed all unreconciled sinners, high

Digitized by Google

and low, to go to their graves, as bears down a hill, backwards; alas! if they should but look forward whither they are going, their hearts would soon be at their months for want of this breastplate—a comfortable persuasion of their peace made with God. Go, therefore, as a poor malefactor condemned to die would do; shut thyself up from all thy old flattering companions, that would still lullaby thy miserable soul in a senseless security, the cradle which the devil rocks souls in to their utter destruction; let none of them come to thee; but send for those that dare be faithful to thee, and, like Samuel, tell thee every word that God saith against thee, and conceal nothing: yea, read thy doom with thy own eyes in the word, and take thy condemnation from God's own mouth, and not man's: 'There is no peace to the wicked,' saith my God; muse on it, till it cleaves to thy soul, like a drawing plaster to a sore, and brings out the very core of thy pride and carnal confidence, which hardened thy heart from all sense of thy condition; by which time the anguish of thy own spirit, seeing the straits thou art brought into, will prompt thee to desire peace with God, and that is that which God waits for to hear drop from thee, as much as Benhadad's servants did for a word from Ahab's mouth.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Look thou propoundest right ends in thy desire of reconciliation with God. Nothing more hateful to God or man than falsehood and treachery in treaties of peace; and yet some men can have words as smooth as butter in their mouths, and war is in their hearts at the same time, Psa. lv. 21. O, take heed of any hollowness of heart in thy inquiry for peace; when found out, as it must needs be, except God's eye fails him, which is impossible, it will exceedingly harden the heart of God against thee. God never repented of any he pardoned, or took up into the chariot of peace with him; because he was never deceived by any, as men are, who often make peace with those that prove at last false brethren, and give them cause to wish they had never known them. Joab kissed Amasa, but he took no heed to the sword in Joab's hand. God looks to the heart, and sees what is in its hand; be sure thou therefore stand clear in thy own thoughts, as to the ends thou aimest at. It is lawful for thee to look to thy own safety. God will give thee leave to look to thyself; this thou mayest, and yet not neglect him; but never was any peace true or sure, where only self-love made it, whether it be with God, or between man and man. Thou seest thou art undone, if thou keepest thy old side; and, therefore, thou seekest peace with God, as the kings that served Hadarezer, 'when they saw he was smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel themselves,' 2 Sam. x. 19: well, this may be allowed thee to come over to God, because his is the surer side. Never any made peace with God, but this argument weighed much with them. If Jacob could have been safe at home, he had never fled to Laban: all are fired out of their holds, before they yield to God. But take heed this be not all thou aimest at, or the chief thou aimest at; this thou mayest do, and hate God as much as ever; like those who are said to yield feignedly to David's victorious arms, because no help for it. A man taken in a storm may be forced under the pent-house of his greatest enemy for shelter, without any change of his heart, or better thoughts of him, than before he was wont. Two things, therefore, thou must look to have in thy eye, above thy own self-preservation. First, The honour of God. Hence oft the saint's prayers are pressed with an argument from God, as well as themselves and their own misery, Psa. lxxix. 9: 'Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name, and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.' Certainly, if God could not be more glorified in our peace and reconciliation, than in our death and damnation, it were a wicked thing to desire it. But God hath cleared this up to us, that he is no loser by acts of mercy. In this lies the greatest revenue of his crown, or else he would not love 'mercy rather than sacrifice.' God is free to chose what suits his own heart best, and most conduceth to the exalting of his great name; and he delights more in the mercy shewn to one, than in the blood of all the damned, that are made a sacrifice to his justice. And, indeed, he had a higher end in their damnation, than their suffering; and that was the enhancing of the glory of his mercy, in his saved ones. This is the beautiful piece God takes delight in, and the other but the shadow to it. Then thou art in a fit disposition to pray for peace, and mayest go with encouragement, when thy heart is deeply affected with the honour that

Digitized by Google

will accrue to God by it. It is an argument God will not deny. 'This,' said Abigail to David, 'shall be no grief to thee nor offence of heart unto my lord,' 1 Sam. xxv.; she meant, he should never have cause to repent that he was kept from shedding blood. Thus mayest thou plead with God, and say, O Lord, when I shall with saints and angels be praising thy pardoning grace in heaven, it will not grieve thee, that thy mercy kept thee from shedding my blood, damning my soul in hell. But now it is evident, that many who seem to seek peace, and pursue it too, very strongly, yet do not take overmuch care for God's honour in the thing; because they are earnest with God to pardon them in a way that were to him dishonourable: pardoned they would be, though wholly ignorant of God and Christ: they would have God to be at peace with them, while they are enemies to him. Like a thief at the bar, he would have the judge spare his life, right or wrong, legally or illegally; what cares he? doth this wretch consider the honour of the judge? or that sinner, who, so he be saved, cares not how unrighteous God is in the act of mercy? O, deceive not yourselves, poor souls; God will not make war between his own attributes, to make peace with you. Secondly, You must desire to be reconciled to God, that you may have fellowship with God. Certainly, a soul sensible what the loss of communion with God is, counts it hath not all her errand done, when it hath naked peace given it: should God say, Soul, I am friends with thee; I have ordered thou shalt never go to hell, here is a discharge under my hand, that thou shalt never be arrested for my debt more; but as for any fellowship with me, or fruition of me, thou canst expect none; I have done with thee, and shall not hold any acquaintance more with thee: certainly the soul would take little joy in her peace; were the fire out as to positive torments. yet a hell would be left in the dismal darkness which the soul would sit under, for want of God's presence. Absalom knew no middle condition that could please him, betwixt seeing the king his father's face, and being killed; 2 Sam. xiv. 32: 'Let me see the king's face, and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.' If I be not worthy to enjoy my father's love and presence, neither do I desire to live; whereas a naughty heart seeks reconciliation without any longing after fellowship with God: like the traitor, if the king will but pardon and save him from the gallows, he is ready to promise him never to trouble him at court; it is his own life, not the king's favour, he desires.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, Throw down thy rebellious arms, and humbly submit to his mercy. God will not so much as treat with thee, so long as thy sword is in thy hand: 'Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord,' Isa. i. 18. Mark when the parley begins; 'Put away the evil of your doings,' ver. 16. Now come and treat with God about a peace.

First, God is a great God, and it doth not become his sovereignty to treat his sorry creature on equal terms, as a king doth with his fellow-prince, who, if he cannot have peace on his own terms, is able probably to revenge himself by force of arms; but as a mighty king with his rebel subject, whom he hath fast bound with chains in prison, and can at pleasure hang up for his treason. The great God will have thee know that. Let those capitulate, who can retire to their strength, and live without peace. But as for thee, poor sinner, thou dost not, I hope, think thou art in a capacity to meet God in the field, or to thrive by this trade of war against God. No, thy only way is to conquer him upon thy knees, to lay thy neck at his foot and say, Lord, I put my life in thy hands, thy true prisoner I will be, choosing rather to die by the hand of thy justice, than to continue fighting against thy mercy. Now, poor soul, thou art in the path that leads to peace. 'Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up,' James iv. 10; that soul shall not long be out of his arms, that is prostrate at his foot. But though the high and lofty One can stoop to take up a penitent sinner into the arms of his pardoning mercy, yet he will not debase his sovereignty to treat with a wretch that stands to his arms, and stouts it out with him. There is one red letter in God's name; 'He will by no means clear the guilty,' Exod. xxxiv.

Secondly, The holy nature of God requires this: sin is that which made the breach, and caused God to take arms against his creature; how canst thou rationally think to make thy peace with him, and keep this source of contention in thy bosom? God is willing to be reconciled with thee, but wilt thou have

Digitized by Google

him be at peace with thy sin also? Is it not enough to be justified from thy sin, but wouldst thou have God betray his own honour, by justifying thee in thy sin? Did you ever hear a prince give a patent to another to cut his own throat? What security canst thou give to God of thy love to him, if thou wilt not renounce that which is the only thing that seeks his life? *Peccatum est decidium.* As long as the traitor is in favour within, God will not raise his siege, or hear a peace without. They cannot reign together; choose which you will have of them; and be not so far deluded, as to think it is enough to send thy lust out of the way for a while, as princes use to do their favourites in a popular commotion, to please the people, and then call for them home, when the hubbub is over. No, God will not be thus dogged and mocked. See how the promise runs, and this he will stand to, Isa. lv. 7: 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.'. See how cautious God is in the terms: no corner is left for the least sin to skulk and save its life in—'he must forsake.' That implies, First, A deliberate choice in the soul: he does it freely. Some men's sins forsake them; 'the unclean spirit goes out,' and 'is not driven out; occasions to sin cease, or bodily ability to execute the commands of sin is wanting. Here is no forsaking sin in all this; but to break from it with a holy indignation and resolution when temptation is most busy, and strength most active; now, as David said, when his enemies compassed him as bees, in the name of the Lord to rebel and resist them, this is to forsake. This is the encomium of Moses; he forsook the court when he was grown up; not for age, as Barzillai, but when his blood was warm in his veins. A man doth not forsake his wife when he is detained from her in prison, but when he puts her away, and gives her a bill of divorce. Secondly, To forsake sin, is to leave it without any thought reserved of returning to it again. Every time a man takes a journey from home about business, we do not say he hath forsaken his house, because he meant, when he went out, to come to it again. No; but when we see a man leave his house, carry all his stuff away with him, lock up his doors, and take up his abode in another never to dwell there more; here is a man who hath, indeed, forsaken his house. It were strange to find a drunkard so constant in the exercise of that sin but some time you may find him sober; and yet a drunkard he is, as well as if he was then drunk. Every one hath not forsaken his trade, that we see now and then in their holiday suit; then the man forsakes his sin, when he throws it from him, and bolts the door upon it, with a purpose never to open more to it: Hosea xiv. 8, 'Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?' Again, Observe, before pardon can be sealed, he must forsake not this sin, or that, but the whole law of sin. 'Let the wicked forsake his way.' A traveller may step from one path to another, and still go on the same way of sin, leave a dirty, deep, and rugged path, for one more smooth and even; so many finding some gross sins uneasy, and too toilsome to their awakened consciences, step into a more cleanly path of civility; but alas, poor creatures! all they get is to go a little more easily and cleanly to hell than their beastly neighbours. But he forsakes the way of sin, that turns out of the whole road. In a word, thou must forsake the blindest path of all in sin's way, that which lies behind the hedge, as I may so say, in the thoughts of the heart, 'and the unrighteous his thoughts:' or else thou knockest in vain at God's door for pardoning mercy; and, therefore, poor soul, forsake all or none; save one lust, and you lose your soul. If men mean to go to hell, why are they so mannerly? this halving with sin is ridiculous. Art thou afraid of this sin, and not of a less, which hinders thy peace, and makes thy damnation as sure, only without so much distraction to thy drowsy conscience at present? This is as ridiculous as it was with him, who being to be hanged, desired that he might by no means go through such a street to the gallows, for fear of the plague that was there. What wilt thou get, poor sinner if thou goest to hell, though thou goest thither by thy ignorance, unbelief, spiritual pride, &c., yet led about so as to escape the plague of open profaneness? O, sirs, consider but the equity, the honourableness of the terms that God offers peace upon. What lust is so sweet or profitable, that is worth burning in hell for? Darius, when he fled before Alexander, that he might run the faster out of danger, 'threw away his massy crown

Digitized by Google

from his head,' which hindered him; and is any lust so precious in thy eye, that thou canst not leave it behind thee, rather than fall into the hands of God's justice? But so sottish is foolish man, that a wise heathen could take notice of it: *Ea sola emi putamus, pro quibus pecuniam solvimus; ea gratuita vocamus, pro quibus nos-ipsos impendimus,* &c. (*Sen. Epist.* 42.) We think we only buy what we part with money for; and as for those things we pay ourselves, our souls, for, these we think we have for nothing, as if the man were not more worth than his money.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, Having been faithful to follow the preceding direction, thou now art in a fair way to effect thy much-desired enterprise; hie thee, therefore, as soon as may be, to the throne of grace, and humbly present thy request to God, that he would be at peace with thee; yea, carry with thee a faith that thou shalt find him more ready to embrace the motion, than thou to make it. Only take heed what thou makest thy plea to move God, and where thou placest thy confidence: not in thy repentance or reformation; this were to play the merchant with God; know he expects not a chapman to barter with him, but an humble suppliant to be suitor to him. Nor his absolute mercy, (as ignorant souls do,) this is to take hold of the sword by the blade, and not by the hilt; such will find their death and damnation from that mercy, which they might be saved by, if they did take hold of it as God offers it them, and that is, through Christ, Isa. xxxvii. 5: 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.' And where lies God's saving strength, but in Christ? He hath laid strength upon this mighty one, able to save to the uttermost all that come to God. It is not God's absolute power or mercy will help thee, but his covenant, strength, and mercy, as this is in Christ. Take hold of Christ, and thou hast hold of God's arm; he cannot strike the soul that holds thereby. Indeed, God's essential goodness is a powerful argument to persuade the poor soul to rely upon the promise in Christ for pardon, when he considers that God who promiseth peace to the believer is a God whose very nature is forgiving, and mercy itself; but had there been no promise to engage this mercy to poor sinners through Christ, this would have been but cold comfort to have believed God was good. He could have damned the whole stock of Adam, and not called his essential goodness the least in question. It is no blot to the almightiness of his power that he doth not all he can. He could make more worlds, if he was so pleased, than he hath done; but we have no ground to believe he will, neither is he the less almighty because he does not. So he could have saved the fallen angels with the sons of lost man; he is not scanted in mercy for such a design, if he had thought it fit; but having passed no promise for such a thing, the essential goodness of God affords the devils but little relief or hope that he will do it; and yet God continues good. And, for aught I can find out of the word, they among the sons of men who, either through simple ignorance of the gospel, or prejudice which their proud reason hath taken up against the way it marks out for making our peace with God through Christ's satisfaction for us, do neglect Christ, or scornfully reject this his satisfaction, and betake themselves to the absolute goodness and mercy of God as the plea which they will make at Christ's bar for their pardon and salvation, shall find as little benefit from it as the devils themselves. Suppose, friends, a prince should freely make a law by which he will govern his people, and takes a solemn oath to keep close to it, could a malefactor that is condemned by this law to die expect any relief by appealing from the law to the mercy and goodness of the prince's nature? I confess some have sped and saved their lives by taking this course; but it hath been because either the prince was imprudent in making the law, or unfaithful in keeping his oath, neither of which can without blasphemy be imputed to God, infinitely wise and holy. He hath enacted a law, called the law of faith, for saving poor sinners through Christ, and is under an oath to make it good, both in the salvation of every one that believes on Christ, and damnation of every one that doth not believe; and, to make all sure, hath given Christ an oath to be faithful in his office, who was trusted as priest to procure redemption, and shall sit as judge to pronounce the sentence, at the great day, of absolution or condemnation. Take heed, therefore, poor sinner, that thou art not drawn from placing thy entire confidence on Christ the Son of God, both God and

Digitized by Google

man in one person, who laid down his life, upon agreement with his Father, to make an atonement for the sin of the world, and now offers thee that blood, which then he shed, as a price to carry in the hand of thy faith to the Father for pardon and peace. No, though they should come and call thee from Christ to Christ, from a Christ without thee to Christ within thee; as the Jesuit doth in the Quaker, into whom he is now got, as the friars of old were wont into their hollow images, that they might deliver their lying doctrines out of the mouths of their reputed saints, and thereby deceive the multitude without any suspicion of their knavery. Just so do the Jesuits now-a-days deliver their Popish stuff out of the mouths of the Quakers; a design so much more dangerous, as it is more cunning than the other. There is too much light shed abroad for that old puppet-play to take; but though men are too wise to lend an ear to a block or a stone, yet holiness in a living saint commands such reverence, that the devil hath ever found, and will to the end of the world, that he may pass least suspected under this cloak. Well, when he comes to call thee from a Christ without thee to a Christ within thee, strip the doctrine out of its pleasing phrase, and, in plain English, he calls thee from trusting in the righteousness of Christ wrought by him for thee, and by faith to be made thine for thy justification before God, to an inherent work of grace, or righteousness wrought by the Spirit of God in thee for thy sanctification and renovation, called sometimes the new creature, and Christ within us. Now hast thou not made a goodly change if thou hast let go thy hold on Christ, who is thy righteousness, to rely on a creature, and that a weak one too, God knows, full of so many imperfections, that thy conscience, except injudicious and given over to believe a lie, can tell that it is but a vein of gold embased with much more earth and dross, which shall never be quite purged till thou art put into the refining-pot of the grave. Look to thyself, Christian; here it is matter of life and death. Prize Christ's grace within thee thou must, yea, thou hast none in thee if thou dost not value it above all the mountains of gold the world hath; but trust not to this Christ, or grace of Christ within thee, for life and salvation; for now thou prizest the creature above God, and settest Christ within thee to fight with Christ without thee. The bride doth well highly to esteem her husband's picture which he hath given her, especially if very like him, and most of all if drawn by his own hand; but it were very ridiculous if she should dote on that so far as to slight her husband, and when she wants money, clothes, or the like, to go not to her husband, but to the picture he gave her, for all. The saint's grace is called Christ within him because it is his picture, and makes the saint so like Christ. This, for the resemblance it bears to the holiness of Christ himself, thy husband, who with the finger of his own Spirit drew it on thy soul, deserves highly to be valued; but what a dotage were it for thee to turn thy back on the Lord Jesus Christ himself, to whom by faith thou art married, and, when thou wantest pardon and comfort, wouldst have heaven and happiness, to expect these, not from Christ, but thy grace! Will Christ thank thee for honouring his creature to the dishonour of his person?

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXHORTATION TO SUCH AS ARE AT PEACE WITH GOD, IN SIX PARTICULARS.

Use 2.—SECONDLY, A few words by way of improvement to you whose peace is concluded with Christ.

First, Hast thou peace with God? look thou makest no peace with sin. This broke thy peace with God: now let thy peace with God begin a war with that, never to have end. Thou canst not surely forget the inestimable wrong and damage thou hast suffered by it; every moment's sweet enjoyment of God, whose bosom-love thou hast now happily recovered, will help to keep the fire of wrath and revenge burning in thy heart against that cursed enemy that both threw and kept thee so long thence. God hath now won thy heart, I hope, by his pardoning mercy, dearly to love him for his love to thee. How then canst thou with patience see any lust come braving forth from its trench, (thy heart I mean,) defying thy God and his grace in thee? Paul's spirit was stirred in him at Athens, to see God dishonoured by the superstition of others; and is not thine, to see him reproached by the pride, unbelief, and other sins

Digitized by Google

that do it from under thy own soul's roof? O, Christian, meditate some noble exploit against it. Now, the more to steel thy heart, and harden it against all relenting towards it, carry the blood and wounds of thy Saviour into the field with thee in the hand of thy faith; the sight of these will certainly enrage thy heart against the lusts that stabbed and killed him, more than the bloody garments of Cæsar, held up by Antony, did the Roman citizens against his murderers. O see how cruelly they used the Lord of glory, and where they laid him in an ignominious grave, and that fastened with a seal stronger than that which man set to it, the curse due to us sinners, never possible to have been broken up by any less than his own almighty arm! And now, Christian, shall these murderers, not of man, but of God (for it was the blood of God that was shed), escape that vengeance which God would have done with thy hand upon them? Wherefore else doth he leave them any life in thy soul, but that thou shouldst have the opportunity of shewing thy love to Christ by running thy dagger of mortification into their heart? Alexander got no more honour by his great victories in the field than by his piety to his dead father Philip, whose bloody death he avenged as soon as he came into the throne, slaying the murderers upon his father's tomb. O shew thou, Christian, thy piety to thy Saviour by falling upon thy cursed lusts, and that speedily: never rest till thou hast had their blood that shed his. Till thou dost this, thou art consenting to all the cruelty that was executed on him: this, this is the honour which all the saints shall have; and, therefore, the two-edged sword of the Spirit is put into their hands, that they may execute the vengeance written.

Secondly, Is God reconciled to thee? Be thou willing to be reconciled to any that have wronged thee; thy God expects it at thy hands: thou hast reason to pardon thy brother for God's sake, who pardoned thee for his pure mercy's sake. Thou in pardoning dost no more than thou owest thy brother; but God pardoned thee when he did owe thee nothing but wrath. Thou needest not, I hope, think that thou dishonourest thyself in the act, though it be to the veriest beggar in the town: know thou dost it after thy betters; thy God stooped lower when he reconciled himself to thee, yea, sought it at thy hands, and no dishonour neither to the high and lofty One. Nay, by implacableness and revenge, thou debasest thyself the most thou canst likely do; for by these thou stoopest not only beneath thy heaven-born nature, but human. It is the devil, and none but such as bear his image, that are implacable enemies; hell-fire it is that is unquenchable. 'The wisdom from above is easily to be entreated.' Thou a Christian, and carry hell-fire about thee! how can it be? When we see a child furious and revengeful, that comes of merciful parents, we use to say, we wonder of whom he got his currish, churlish disposition; his father and mother were not so. Who learns thee, O Christian, to be so revengeful and unmerciful? thou hast it not of thy heavenly Father, I am sure.

Thirdly, Is God at peace with thee? hath he pardoned thy sins? Never then distrust his providence for anything thou wantest, as to this life. Two things well weighed would help thy faith in this particular. First, When he pardoned thy sins he did more for thee than this comes to; and did he give the greater, and will he grudge thee the less? Thou hast Christ in thy pardon bestowed on thee; 'how shall he not with him also freely give thee all things?' Rom. viii. 32. When the father gives his child the whole orchard, it were folly to question whether he gives him this apple, or that in it. 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's,' 1 Cor. iii. 22. The reconciled soul hath a right to all; the whole world is his; but as a father, though he settles a fair estate on his child, yet lets him hold no more in his own hand than he can well manage, so God gives believers a right to all the comforts of this life, but proportions so much out to them, for their actual use, as his infinite wisdom sees meet, so that he that hath less than another, in his present possession, ought to impute it not to any want of love or care in God, but to the wisdom both of his love and care, that gives stock as we have grace to work it out: we pour the wine according as the cup is; that which but fills one, would be half lost if poured into a less. Secondly, Consider how God gives these temporalities to those that he denies peace and pardon to. Though within awhile they are to be cast into hell, yet while on earth his providence reacheth unto them. And doth God feed these ravens, unclean birds? doth he cause his rain to drop fatness on their

Digitized by Google

fields? and will he neglect thee, thinkest thou, that art a believer? If the prince feeds the traitor in prison, surely the child in his house shall not starve. In a word to allude to that, Luke xii. 28, if God in his providence so abounds to the ungodly, as we see he doth; if he clothes this grass (for to this the wicked may well be compared, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into hell's burning oven), 'how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?'

Fourthly, Art thou at peace with God? O then shew no discontent at any cross or affliction that God visiteth thee withal. If he hath visited thee first with his mercy, thou hast reason to bid him kindly welcome, when he comes to visit thee with his rod. Thou hast sugar by thee now, to sweeten thy bitter cup. When the prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem, it is said, 'The elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? and he said, Peaceably,' 1 Sam. xvi. 4. Thus when God comes with some heavenly affliction to us, it may make us tremble till we know what it comes for, whether peaceably or no. Now, if thou art at peace with God, the fear is over; it cannot but come peaceably. Thou mayest conclude it comes on mercy's errand. What condition canst thou, O pardoned soul, be in, that should part thee and the joy of thy peace with God? Is it the wrath of man thou fearest? Possibly thou hast many enemies, and those great ones, and their wrath as great as such can express. Let it be so; is God among them or no? Doth God let out their wrath in his wrath against thee? if not, thou exceedingly wrongest God, if overmuch troubled, and thyself also. Thou wrongest God by not sanctifying his name in thy heart, whose mercy, I hope, is able to secure thee from their wrath. 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' Rom. viii. 31. Thou needest not fear them, though an army of them were about then, no more than if they were so many wisps of straw. And thou wrongest thyself also; how, indeed, can we wrong God and not ourselves? So long as thou art under the power of such a fear, from man's wrath, thou canst never have the taste of God's love in its true sweetness. Again, art thou sick, poor, and what not beside? May not God reasonably expect, that reconciling mercy should stop thy mouth from whispering any word of discontent against him, and prevent all envious glances of thy eye at the prosperity of the wicked? Remember, man, that thou canst say one great work which they cannot, in the midst of all their pomp and worldly glory, 'Though I lie here poor and sick, yet I am, through mercy, at peace with God.' This well thought on, would soon change both your notes; the joy of the prosperous sinner into bitter mourning, and thy sorrow, Christian, into joy. The Lady Elizabeth, afterwards England's gracious queen, hearing a simple milk-maid sing merrily in the field, when she, poor princess, being then a sorrowful prisoner, had more mind to sigh than sing, though served at the same time in a state as a princess, said that poor maid was happier than herself. And so would the sinner, how great and high soever in the world, think the poorest Christian, with his rags and penury, a better man, and happier in his liberty, and peace with God, than himself, in all his grandeur and worldly gaieties, did he but consider, that in the midst of all these he is a prisoner, not to man, but God, out of whose hands there is no escaping.

Fifthly, Comfort thyself with this, that thou who art at peace with God now on earth shall feast with God ere long in heaven, Rom. viii. 30: 'And whom he justified, them he also glorified.' And do not think this news too good or great to be true. Here is a word for it, you see. Heaven's number of glorified saints is made up of justified sinners; neither more nor less of the one, than of the other. Art thou justified by faith, by which thou hast peace with God? then lose not thy privilege, but rejoice with thy fellow-saints 'in the hope of the glory of God.' It is before thee; every day brings thee nearer to it, and nothing can hinder thee of it at last; not thy sins themselves, and I know thou fearest them most. He that paid thy great score, at thy conversion, will find mercy enough in his heart surely to pass by thy small debts, which thy own infirmity, and Satan's subtlety, have run thee into. Thou wert an enemy when God thought of doing the first; but now thou art a friend, and this will oblige him to do the second, that he may not lose his disbursement in the first; yea, provision is made by God in his method of our salvation for the one, as strongly as for the other. Christ died to make us, enemies to God, friends with him; and he lives now to bring God and us, being thus made friends, to meet in

Digitized by Google

one heaven together. Yea, the apostle gives the advantage to this of the two for our faith to triumph in: 'For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life,' Rom. v. 10. As if the apostle had said, Can you believe that God hath taken you, that were bloody enemies, into a state of peace and favour with himself? Surely then you must needs find it easier for your faith to argue from reconciliation to salvation, than from hostility and enmity to pardon and peace. Could Christ procure the one by his death, when he was weakest, as I may so say, and at the lowest descent of his humiliation; how much more shall he, in the height of his court favour in heaven, where he hath all power given him, and in particular the keys of hell and death, to open and shut as he pleaseth, be able to save those whom he hath reconciled?

Sixthly, Art thou at peace with God? Knowing the goodness of God to thyself, do thou woo in some others to embrace the same mercy. The house is not so full, but yet 'there is room,' Luke xiv. 22. Hast thou none thou lovest so well, as to wish them thy happiness? hapily thou hast a carnal husband lying by thy side, children of thy womb or loins, neighbours in whose company thou art every day almost, and all these in an unreconciled state, who, should they die as now they live, their precious souls are lost for ever, and yet themselves think no more of this misery coming on them, than the silly sheep doth what the butcher is doing when he is whetting his knife to cut her throat. Well, the less merciful they are to their own souls, the more need there is thou shouldst shew thy compassion towards them. We take most care of those that are least capable of taking care for themselves. If thou hadst a friend sick in thy house, and of such a disease that he could not help himself, should he die rather than thou wouldst look after him? If a child, condemned to die, though he did himself not mind the getting of a pardon, yet surely thou wouldst run and ride to obtain it, rather than see him end his days so shamefully. In a word, didst thou but know that thy neighbour had an intention to put an end to himself, and for that end had locked himself up in a room, wouldst thou not bestir thee to break up the door, rather than the man should thus miscarry? But, alas! where is the holy violence that is used to save poor souls? Parents, husbands, neighbours, they can see their relations going to hell before their eyes; and who saith to them, Why do you so? O for the Lord's sake be more merciful to the souls of others. Thou hast found a feast; let not any that are near thee starve for want of knowledge where it is to be had. Go and invite all thou canst see to God's house; so did David, Psalm xxxiv. 8: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good.' Thou needst not fear a chiding from God, for sending him more guests. He complains he hath no more; 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life,' John v. 40. He threatens those that keep sinners off from making their peace with him, by flattering them with a false one, called, a 'strengthening of the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life,' Ezek. xiii. 22. How acceptable a work then must it needs be to woo souls to Christ! The merchant is not angry for sending a customer into his warehouse, that will buy what he hath taken so much cost and travail to get that he may sell; nor will the physician blame any for bringing a patient to him, by whose cure he may let the world know his skill and art. And this is the great design Christ hath long had, and in particular prayed for, John xvii. 21: 'That the world might believe that he was sent of God.' What aims he at in the gathering in of souls, by the grace of the gospel, but 'to take out a people,' from the heap of sinners, 'for his name?' Acts xv. 14; that is, cull out a number, in shewing mercy to whom he might exalt his own name gloriously.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT PEACE OF CONSCIENCE IS A BLESSING TO BE OBTAINED FROM THE GOSPEL, AND ONLY THE GOSPEL, WITH A DOUBLE DEMONSTRATION THEREOF.

We come now to the second kind of peace, and that is, peace of consolation, or peace of conscience: by the former, the poor sinner is reconciled to God; by this, he comes *anima pacata sibi*, a soul reconciled to itself: since man fell out with God, he could never be truly friends with his own conscience. This second

Digitized by Google

peace is so necessary, that he cannot taste the sweetness of the first, nor indeed of any other mercy without it. This is to the soul what health is to the body; it sugars and sweetens all enjoyments. A suit, though of cloth of gold, sits not easy on a sick man's back. Nothing joyous to a distressed conscience. Moses brought good news to the distressed Israelites in Egypt; but it is said, 'They hearkened not to him for anguish of spirit,' Exod. vi. 9. Hannah, she went up to the festival at Jerusalem, with her husband; but it is said 'She wept and did not eat,' 1 Samuel i. 7. Truly thus the wounded soul goes to the sermon, but doth not eat of the feast before it; hears many precious promises, but her ear is shut up from receiving the good news they bring. Tell one, in trouble of conscience, here is your dear husband, sweet children; will you not rejoice with them? Alas! the throes such a one feels are so amazing, that he regards these things no more than Phineas's wife in her sore travail did the women that joyed her with the birth of a son. Set the most royal feast before such a soul, that ever was on prince's table, and, poor heart, it had rather go into a corner and weep, than sit and eat of those delicacies. 'A wounded spirit who can bear?' yea, who can cure? Some diseases are, for their incurableness, called, *ludibrium medicorum*,—the physician's shame and reproach. To be sure, this spiritual trouble of an accusing conscience puts all the world to shame for their vain attempts. Many have attempted to conjure this evil spirit out of their own bosoms and others,' but have found it at last to leap upon them, and prevail against them, as the evil spirit, Acts xix. 14, did by the sons of Sceva. Now, peace of conscience, I am now to shew, is the blessing of the gospel, and only of the gospel; conscience knows Jesus, and the gospel of Jesus; these, and none else, it will obey. Two particulars considered will demonstrate the truth of the point. First, if we consider what is the argument that pacifies and satisfies conscience. Secondly, what the power and strength that is required to apply this argument so close and home to the conscience as to quiet and fully satisfy it; both these will be found in the gospel, and only in the gospel.

SECTION I.—First, Let us inquire what is the argument that is able to pacify conscience when thoroughly awakened. Now, to know this, we must inquire, what is the cause of all those convulsions of horror and terror with which the consciences of men are at any time so sadly rent and distorted. Now this is sin; could this little word, but great plague, be quite blotted out of men's minds and hearts, the storm would be soon hushed, and the soul become a calm sea, quiet and smooth, without the least wave of fear to ruffle the face thereof. This is the Jonah, which raiseth the storm; the Achan, that troubles the soul. Wherever this comes, as was observed of a great queen in France, a war is sure to follow. When Adam sinned, he dissolved another manner of jewel than Cleopatra did; he drank away this sweet peace of conscience in one unhappy draught, which was worth more to him than the world he lived in. No wonder that it rose in his conscience as soon as it was down his throat; 'They saw that they were naked,' Gen. iii. 7. Their consciences reproached them as cursed apostates. That, therefore, which brings peace to conscience, must prostrate this Goliath, throw this troubler overboard, pluck this arrow out of the soul; or else the war will not end, the storm will not down, the wound will not close and heal, which conscience labours under. Now the envenomed head of sin's arrow, that lies burning in the conscience, and by its continual boking and throbbing there keeps the poor sinner out of quiet, yea, sometimes in unsupportable torment and horror, is guilt, whereby the creature is alarmed up to judgment, and bound over to the punishment due to his sin; which, being no less than the infinite wrath of the eternal living God, must needs lay the poor creature into a dismal agony, from the fearful expectation thereof, in his accusing conscience. He, therefore, that would use an argument to pacify and comfort a distressed conscience, that lies roasting upon these burning coals of God's wrath, kindled by his guilt, must quench these coals, and bring him the certain news of this joyful message, that his sins are all pardoned, and God, whose wrath doth so affright him, is undoubtedly, yea, everlastingly reconciled to him. This, and no other argument, will stop the mouth of conscience, and bring the creature to true peace with his own thoughts. 'Son be of good cheer,' saith Christ, to the palsy man, 'thy sins be forgiven thee,' Matt. ix. 2. Not, Be of good cheer, thy health is given thee, though that he had also; but, Thy sins are

Digitized by Google

forgiven thee. If a friend should come to a malefactor, on his way to the gallows, put a sweet posy into his hands, and bid him be of good cheer, smell on that; alas! this would bring little joy with it to the poor man's heart, who sees the place of execution before him. But if one comes from the prince with a pardon, which he puts into his hand, and bids him be of good cheer; this, and this only, will reach the poor man's heart, and overrun it with a sudden ravishment of joy. Truly, anything short of pardoning mercy is as inconsiderable to a troubled conscience, towards any relieving or pacifying it, as that posy in a dying prisoner's hand would be. Conscience demands as much to satisfy it as God himself doth to satisfy him for the wrong the creature hath done him. Nothing can take off conscience from accusing, but that which takes off God from threatening. Conscience is God's sergeant, which he employs to arrest the sinner. Now the sergeant hath no power to release his prisoner, upon any private composition between him and the prisoner; but listens, whether the debt be fully paid, or the creditor fully satisfied; then, and not till then, he is discharged of his prisoner. Well, we have now only one step to go further, and we shall bring this demonstration to a head; from what quarter comes this good news, that God is reconciled to a poor soul, and that his sins are pardoned? surely from the gospel of Christ, and no other way besides. Here alone is the covenant of peace to be read between God and sinners; here the sacrifice by which this pardon is purchased; here the means discovered by which poor sinners may have benefit of this purchase; and therefore here alone can the accusing conscience find peace. Had the stung Israelites looked on any other object, besides the brazen serpent, they had never been healed. Neither will the stung conscience find ease with looking upon any, besides Christ in the gospel-promise. The Levite and the priest looked on the wounded man, but would not come near him; there he might have lain and perished in his blood for all them. It was the good Samaritan that poured oil into his wounds. Not the law, but Christ, by his blood, bathes and supples, closeth and cureth the wounded conscience. Not a drop of oil in all the world to be got, that is worth anything for this purpose, besides what is provided and laid up in this gospel-vial. There was abundance of sacrifices offered up in the Jewish church yet put all the blood of those beasts, together, which was poured out from first to last in that dispensation and they were not able to quite one conscience, or purge away one sin. 'The conscience of sin,' as the apostle phraseth it, Heb. x. 2, that is, guilt in their conscience, would still have remained unblotted, notwithstanding all these (if served from what was spiritually signified by them). And the reason is given ver. 4: 'For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away any sins.' There is no proportion betwixt the blood of beasts, though it could swell into a river, a sea and the dermit of the least sin. Man's sin deserves man's death, and that eternal, both of soul and body in hell. This is the price God hath set upon the head of every sin. Now the death of beasts, being so far beneath this price, which divine justice demands as satisfaction for the wrong sin hath done him, it must needs be as far beneath pacifying the sinner's conscience; which requires as much to satisfy it, yea the very same as it doth to satisfy the justice of God himself. But in the gospel, behold joyful news is brought to the sinner's ears of a fountain of blood there opened, which for its preciousness is as far above the price that divine justice demands for man's sin, as the blood of bulls and beasts was beneath it; and that is the blood of Jesus Christ, who freely poured it upon the cross, and by 'it obtained eternal redemption for us,' Heb. ix. This is the door by which all true peace and joy comes in to the conscience; here we are directed to bottom our confidence, and draw out comfort here, and nowhere else, Heb. x. 22: 'Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience:' mark that, 'sprinkled from an evil conscience.' Conscience, by office, is appointed to judge of a man's actions and state; whether good or bad pardoned or unpardoned. If the state be good, then it is to acquit and comfort; if evil then to accuse and condemn him: therefore the evil conscience here, is the accusing conscience. From this evil conscience we are said to be sprinkled, that is, freed by the blood of Christ sprinkled on us; it is sin the evil conscience accureth of, and wrath (the due

Digitized by Google

punishment for that) it condemns the poor creature unto; and to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ is to have the blood of Christ applied to the heart by the Spirit for pardon and reconciliation with God. Sprinkling, in the law, did denote the cleansing of the person so sprinkled from all legal impurities, Levit. xiv. 6, yea, the believing soul from all sinful uncleanness by the blood of Christ, which was signified by the blood of those sacrifices. Therefore David prays, Psalm li. 7, 'Purge me with hyssop, than shall I be clean;' that is, apply the blood of Christ to my troubled conscience (as they with a bunch of hyssop did the blood of the beast, into which it was dipped, upon the leper, to cleanse him). 'Then,' saith he, 'I shall be clean;' this sin, which now doth affright my conscience, shall be washed off, and I at peace, as if I had never sinned. To this sprinkling of blood the Holy Ghost alludes, Heb. xii. 24, where we are said in the gospel administration 'to be come to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than the blood of Abel;' that is, better things in the conscience. Abel's blood, sprinkled in the guilt of it upon Cain's conscience, spake swords and daggers, hell and damnation; but the blood of Christ, sprinkled on the conscience of a poor trembling sinner, speaks pardon and peace. Hence it is called 'the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,' 1 Pet. iii. 21. An answer supposeth a question; an answer towards God supposeth a question from God to the creature. Now the question God here is supposed to propound to the poor creature, may be conceived to be this: What canst thou say, who art a sinner, and standest by the curse of my righteous law doomed to death and damnation, why thou shouldst not die the death pronounced against every sinner?

Now the soul that hath heard of Christ, and hearing of him, hath received him by faith into his heart, is the person, and the only person, that can answer this question, so as to satisfy God or himself. Take the answer, as it is formed and fitted for, yea, put into the mouth of every believer, by the apostle Paul, Rom. viii. 34: 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us:' such an answer this is, that God himself cannot object against it; and therefore St. Paul, representing all believers, triumphs in the invincible strength thereof against all the enemies of our salvation; 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' ver. 35; and proceeds to challenge death and devils, with all their attendants, to come and do their worst against believers, who have got this breastwork about them; and at last he displays his victorious colours, and goes out of the field with this holy confidence, that none (be they what they will) shall ever be able to hurt them, ver. 38, 39: 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' In him he lodgeth his colours, and lays up all his confidence. But I am afraid I have been too long, if I can be said to be too long on this subject, the richest vein in the whole mine of gospel treasure.

SECTION II.—The second demonstration is taken from the strength and power required to press this argument home to the conscience, so as to satisfy it, and make it acquiesce therein; conscience is a lock that goes hard; though the key fit it, (I mean, the argument used to comfort it be suitable and strong,) yet if this key be in a weak hand, that cannot turn it in this lock, as it is whenever a mere creature holds it, conscience will not open; its doubts and fears will not be resolved. No, this must be the work of the Spirit, or else it will never be done. Conscience is God's officer: and though the debt be paid in heaven, yet it will not let the soul go free, till a warrant comes from thence to authorize it. And who can bring this but the Spirit of God? So that, as it is not in all their power that are about the poor prisoner to comfort him, till news come from court, what the prince means to do with him; so here in this case. 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who can behold him?' Job xxxiv. 29, Now, two things I shall do for the bringing this demonstration to a head. First, Show that the gospel only presents the Spirit of God to us under the notion of a comforter. Secondly, The admirable fitness and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to pacify and comfort a guilty, troubled

Digitized by Google

conscience. The first will evince, that peace of conscience is nowhere else to be found but from the gospel; the second will shew, that it is there abundantly to be found.

First, It is the gospel alone that presents the Spirit of God as a comforter to poor sinners. Indeed the comforting office of the Spirit is founded on the satisfaction of Jesus Christ. When Christ had shed his blood, and in it laid down upon the nail the full price of a sinner's peace with God; then at his return to heaven he prays his Father to send the Comforter: neither could Christ desire this request of his Father, nor his Father grant it to him, but upon the account of this his death, which secures the justice of God from receiving any damage by the comfort which the Spirit carries into the believing sinner's bosom. Christ tells his disciples thus much, John xvi. 7: 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you;' mark, the Spirit, as a Comforter, stays till Christ goes to heaven to send him down; and no room for Christ there, till the work was done he came about; and what was that but by his bloody death to purchase peace with God, for poor believing sinners? And now let him come when he will, the Spirit is ready to be sent as a comforter, as soon as he appears in the heavens with his blood as an intercessor. But whence then had the Old Testament saints all their peace and comfort, who lived before Christ returned to heaven; yea, before he took his first journey, from heaven, I mean, to earth? I answer, upon the same account they had their comfort, that they had their pardon. They were pardoned through the blood of Christ, who was virtually a lamb slain from the beginning of the world, and they were comforted by the Spirit of Christ, whose comforting office bears the same date with Christ's mediatorial office. As all their pardons were issued out upon the credit of Christ, who stood engaged in the fulness of time to lay down his life: so all the comforts which the Spirit of Christ issued out into their consciences, was upon the same credit of Christ, who should, as in the fulness of time, die on earth for sinners, so appear also in the heavens, (by virtue of the satisfaction that his death should make), there to intercede with the Father for a comforter. Thus you see the first thing. The Spirit as a comforter hath his office from the gospel-covenant, and could never have spoken a word of comfort, but upon this gospel account. Hence it is, when the Father sends him as a comforter, he sends him in Christ's name, who hath closed the breach between him and sinners, John xiv. 26, that is, for his sake, and at his entreaty; yea, when the Spirit doth comfort, what is it he saith? the joyful news he brings is gospel-intelligence, John xvi. 13, 14: 'He shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear he shall speak;' the meaning is, when he comes to teach, he shall not bring new light, different from what shines in the gospel; but what truth Christ preached in the gospel, that he shall teach when he comforts; the ingredients which his soul-reviving cordials shall be made of, are, what grow in the gospel-garden, as ver. 14: 'He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shew it to you,' that is, my death, my merit, my resurrection, my ascension and intercession, my promises purchased and sealed with my blood, these he shall take and make report of them to you, for your eternal joy and comfort; so that, if it had not been for these, the Spirit, who is Christ's messenger, would have wanted an errand of this comfortable nature to have brought unto poor sinners: yea, instead of a comforter, he would have been an accuser and a tormentor; he that now bears witness with our spirits for our reconciliation, adoption, and salvation, would have joined in a sad testimony with our guilty consciences against us, for our damnation and destruction.

Secondly, I am to shew the admirable fitness of the Spirit for this comforting office, which the gospel reveals him to have, for the pacifying and satisfying the consciences of poor disconsolate sinners. You have heard that the gospel affords an argument sufficient to satisfy the most troubled conscience in the world, to wit, the full satisfaction which Christ by his precious blood hath made to God, for sinners. But if man had been left to improve this as well as he could for his comfort, he might have lain long enough roaring in the horror of his scorched conscience without ease, for want of one drop of this cooling, healing balm into it. But as both the wisdom and love of God appeared in providing an able Saviour to purchase eternal redemption for us; as also a meet Comforter,

Digitized by Google

as able to apply this purchased redemption to us; his consolations are called 'strong consolations.' Christ showed his strength when he unhinged the gates of the grave, and made his way out of that dark prison by his glorious resurrection; by this, 'he was declared to be the Son of God with power,' as the apostle hath it, Rom, i. 4. And truly it requires no less power to break open the dungeon, wherein the guilty conscience lies shut up, as one free among the dead, in his own despairing thoughts; for if you observe it well, the same stone and seal are upon the sinner's conscience to keep him down from a resurrection to comfort, as was on Christ's grave, to keep him down from a resurrection to life. What was the heaviest stone, the strongest seal upon dead Jesus, to keep him from rising? Not the stone man rolled upon him; not the seal the Jews thought to fasten the grave with; but the curse of the law for sin, which divine justice rolled upon him; this pressed the heaviest upon Christ without all compare; the angel himself that rolled away the stone could not have removed the curse. Now look upon the distressed conscience's grave, where its own guilt hath laid it; what is that? no other then the lowest hell in its fears and present dismal apprehensions. I am damned, I am for ever an undone creature, is the language such a one rings continually in his own ears. But inquire what is it that keeps him down in this grave? what hinders, but the poor wretch may be helped out of this pit of horror, and receive some comfort? Alas, he will tell you that it is but in vain to comfort him, this ointment is all wasted to no purpose, which you pour upon his head. No, he is an undone sinner, the curse of God sticks like a dagger in his heart, the wrath of God lies like a mountain of lead on his conscience; except you can put your hand into his bosom, and pluck out the one, or by main force roll off the other, it is impossible that he should be raised to any peace or comfort in his miserable conscience; you see it is the same gravestone on both. But for thy eternal comfort know, poor heart, that art thus fast laid under the sense of the curse due to thy sins, as the weight is the same; that keeps thee from comfort, which lay on Christ to keep him from life, so the same power and strength is sent to raise thee to comfort that enabled Christ to rise to life. That Spirit, who kept the Lord Jesus from seeing corruption in the grave; that restrained death, when it had Christ in its very mouth, so as it could no more feed on him, than the whale could digest Jonah; yea, that quickened his dead body, and raised him with honour, not only to life, but immortality also; is he that Christ sends for his messenger, to come and satisfy the trembling consciences of his poor children on earth, concerning his love, yea, his Father's love to them for his sake. This blessed Spirit hath all the properties of a comforter; he is so pure and holy, he cannot deceive; called therefore, 'the Spirit of truth,' John xiv. If he tell thee thy sins are pardoned, thou mayest believe him, he will not flatter: if it were not so, he would have brought another message to thee; for he can chide and reprove, as well as comfort, convince of sin as well as of righteousness. He is so wise and omniscient, that he cannot be deceived. Never did the Spirit of God knock at the wrong door, and deliver his letters into a wrong hand, (as a man may do, especially where persons are very like.) The Spirit exactly knows the heart of God to the creature, with all his counsels and purposes concerning him, 1 Cor. ii. 11: 'The Spirit searcheth all things, the deep things of God.' And what are those deep things of God the apostle means, but the counsels of love which lie deep in his heart, till the Spirit draws them forth and acquaints the creature with them? as appears by ver. 9. And also he knows the whole frame of man's heart: it were strange, if he that made the cabinet should not know every secret box in it. Some few men have compassed that we call the greater world; but the little world of man, as we call him, never did any creature encircle with his knowledge, no not the devil himself, who hath made it his work so many thousands of years to make a full discovery of it: but the Spirit of God knows him, *intus est in cute*, as we say 'thoroughly;' and knowing both these, he cannot be deceived. In a word, he is so unresistible, that none can hinder the efficacy of his comforts. The pardon brought by Nathan to David, did not lie so close as the holy man desired; and, therefore, away goes he to beg comfort of the Comforter, Psa. li., where you find him on his knees, praying hard to have his lost joy restored, and his trembling heart established by the free Spirit of God. Though thou canst baffle man, and,

Digitized by Google

through thy own melancholy fancy, and the sophistry of Satan, who coins distinctions for thee, evade the arguments that Christians and ministers bring for thy comfort; yet when the Spirit comes himself, all disputes end: the devil cannot argue with him; no, then the lying Spirit vanisheth, and our own fears too, as the darkness flees before the sun: so sweetly and powerfully doth the comforting Spirit overrun the heart with a flood of joy, that the soul can no more see her sins in the guilt of them, than Noah could the molehills, when the whole earth was under water.

CHAPTER IX.

A REPROOF TO THREE SORTS OF PERSONS THAT OFFEND AGAINST THIS PEACE WHICH THE GOSPEL BRINGS.

Use 1. FIRST, Is peace of conscience the blessing of the gospel? this reproves three sorts of persons.

SECTION I.—First, The papists, who interpretatively deny this, in denying that any person can know in this life, unless by an extraordinary revelation, that he is a child of God, and one that shall be saved; which, if true, would stave all to pieces the vessel in which the Christian's joy and inward peace are kept. Whence comes the peace we have with our consciences, but from the knowledge we have of our peace with God? Rom. v. i.: 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, by whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' If the poor soul be left at uncertainties here, and the gospel cannot resolve it, what its state is, for hell or heaven, farewell to all inward peace; the poor Christian then may say of himself, with a trembling heart, what St. John saith in another case of him that hateth his brother, 1 John ii. 11: 'He walks in darkness, and knows not whither he goes:' truly then it might rather be called the gospel of fears and doubts than the gospel of peace. But is that the top of the blessing the gospel brings to saints, which was almost the bottom of the curse that the law denounced against sinners? Deut. xxviii. 66, that 'their life should hang in doubt before them, and they should fear day and night, and should have no assurance of life. Bold men, that dare so wretchedly disfigure the sweet face of the gospel! making Christ, in his precious promises, speak as doubtfully to his saints, as the devil did in his oracles to his devotees. Because their hypocrisy makes them justly question their own salvation, and will not suffer them to apply the comfort of the promises to themselves, must they therefore seal up these wells of salvation from those that are sincere, and then lay the blame on the gospel, which is due only to their own wickedness? But there is a mystery of iniquity which hath at last been found to be at the root of this uncomfortable doctrine of theirs. They are a little akin to Judas, who was a thief, and carried the bag. These have a bag too, into which they put more gold and silver that this doctrine brings them in, than ever Judas had in his: though the doctrine of gospel grace to poor sinners would bring more peace to others' consciences, might it be seen in its naked glory among them; yet the superstitious fear which they keep ignorant souls in, brings more money to their purses; and this lies so near the heart of their religion, that gospel, Christ, heaven, and all must bow unto it.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Those are to be reproved who frame very unlovely images in their own foolish imaginations of the gospel, as if there was nothing less than peace of conscience and inward comfort to be found in it; and all because they see some that profess it who cannot shew that they have got any more peace and comfort since their acquaintance with the gospel than they had before, or than themselves have, who are yet strangers to it; yea, may be, discover more trouble of spirit. Such, I would desire to take these following particulars, by way of answer, into their serious consideration.

First, Consider all are not true Christians that hang upon the gospel by profession; and no blame can be laid on the gospel, though it doth not lavish out this treasure to every one that scrapes acquaintance with it. The Spirit of God is too wise and faithful to set his seal to a blank. The minister indeed offers peace to all that will accept it; but where the peace of the gospel meets with a false heart, it will not stay there, Mattt. x. 13: 'If the house be not

Digitized by Google

worthy, let your peace return unto you.' As the dove returned to the ark again, when it found the earth under water, so doth the Spirit of God carry his comfort back with him to heaven from a soul that is yet in the suds of sin, soaking in his abominations. Where can this heavenly dove find rest for the sole of her foot in such a soul? And will he speak peace to that soul in which himself can find no rest?

Secondly, As for those that are sincere, true-hearted Christians, there are several considerations which will vindicate the gospel to answer its name, and to be a gospel of peace and consolation. First, Some that are sincere Christians, and yet do not so clearly understand the doctrine of the gospel as others; and the want of light, of joy, and comfort in their consciences comes from that want of light in their understandings. The ignorance of the workman doth not disparage the art. *Plus est in arte, quam in artifice.* There is fulness of comfort in the principles of the gospel, but every Christian hath not attained 'to the riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,' which the apostle directs the Colossians to, as a sovereign means whereby 'their hearts might be comforted,' Col. ii. 2. Secondly, Some that do understand the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ, (the only foundation to build and rear up true comfort and peace of conscience on,) yet may by their negligence in their Christian course (not walking carefully by the rule of the gospel) deprive themselves at present of this sweet peace, which otherwise might flow into their bosoms from the promises of the gospel: 'As many as walk by this rule, peace be on them,' Gal. vi. 16. And if so, what blame can be laid on the gospel? Be the pen never so good, and the hand never so skilful, it will not write on wet paper; yet we do not blame the hand or pen, but paper. If the heart (though of a saint never so eminent) be under the defilement of a present lust not repented of, no promise will speak peace to him; he is a disorderly walker, and the Spirit hath his rod to whip such, no sweetmeats of joy and peace to entertain them withal in that plight. Thirdly, As for those which do walk close to the rule of the gospel, (I mean, by a sincere endeavour,) and thou seest no such peace and comfort as we speak of that they have, I answer,

First, They may have it, and thou not know it. The saint's joy and peace is not such a light, frothy joy as the world's; *Res severa verum gaudium.* The parlour wherein the Spirit of Christ entertains the Christian is an inner room, not next the street, for every one that goes by to smell the feast.' 'The stranger intermeddles not with his joy,' Prov. xiv. 10. Christ and the soul may be at supper within, and thou not so much as see one dish go in, or hear the music that sounds so sweetly in the Christian's ears. Perhaps thou thinkest he wants peace, because he doth not hang out a sign in his countenance of the joy and peace he hath within. Alas, poor wretch! may not the saint have a peaceful conscience, with a solemn, yea, sad countenance, as well as thou and thy companions have a sorrowful heart, when there is nothing but fair weather in your faces? 'In laughter the heart is sorrowful,' Prov. xiv. 13. Sure he means the wicked man's laughter. It never looks more like rain with them than when it shines; their conscience lowers when their face laughs: so on the contrary, never more inward peace and comfort to be found in a saint's bosom than sometimes when his face is blubbered with tears. Shouldst thou come in and hear the Christian bemoaning himself, and complaining with sighs and sobs of his sins against God, thou wouldst go home and cry out of this melancholy religion, and the sad condition this man was in. And yet he whom thou so pitiest can desire thee to save it for thyself, and not spend it in vain for him, who would not part with that very sorrow, that scares thee so much, for all the joy which the world, with all its gallantry, when best set forth, could afford. There is a mystery in this sorrow thou canst not unriddle. Know therefore there is a sorrow and anguish of heart which ariseth from the guilt of sin, and the fearful apprehensions of God's wrath due to sin; and another that flows not from fear of wrath arising from guilt, but from the sense of sins in being in the soul, that provokes the Christian to do that which is dishonourable to that God who hath pardoned his sins to him; and this is the sorrow which sometimes makes the saints go for sad, uncomfortable creatures, when at the same time their hearts are as full of comfort from the sense of God's pardoning mercy as

Digitized by Google

they can hold. This sorrow is but like a summer shower, melted by the sense of God's love, as that by the warm sun, and leaves the soul, as that doth a garden of sweet flowers on which it falls, more fresh and odoriferous.

Secondly, Though some precious souls that have closed with Christ, and embraced the gospel, be not at present brought to rest in their own consciences, but continue for a while under some dissatisfactions and troubles in their own spirits, yet even then they have peace of conscience in a threefold respect; *In precio, in promisso, in semine.* First, Every true believer hath peace of conscience *in precio;* the gospel puts that price into his hand, which will assuredly purchase it, and that is the blood of Christ. We say that is gold which is worth gold, which we may anywhere exchange for gold; such is the blood of Christ; it is peace of conscience, because the soul that hath this may exchange it for this. God himself cannot deny the poor creature that prays on these terms: Lord, give me peace of conscience; here is Christ's blood, the price of it. That which could pay the debt, surely can procure the receipt. Peace of conscience is but a discharge under God's hand that the debt due to divine justice is fully paid. The blood of Christ hath done that the greater for the believer, it shall therefore do this the less. If there were such a rare potion that did infallibly procure health to every one that takes it, we might safely say, as soon as the sick man hath drunk it down, that he hath drunk his health: it is in him, though at present he doth not feel himself to have it; in time it will appear. Secondly, *In promisso.* Every true believer hath peace of conscience in the promise, and that we count as good as ready money in the purse which we have sure bond for. Psa. xxix. 11: 'The Lord will bless his people with peace.' He is resolved on it, and then who shall hinder it? It is worth your reading the whole psalm, to see what weight the Lord gives to this sweet promise, for the encouragement of our faith in expecting the performance thereof. Nothing more hard to enter into the heart of a poor creature (when all is in an uproar in his bosom, and his conscience threatening nothing but fire and sword, wrath, vengeance from God for his sins), than thoughts or hopes of peace and comfort. Now the psalm is spent in showing what great things God can do, and that with no more trouble to himself than a word speaking. 'The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty,' ver. 4. 'It breaks the cedars, it divides the flames, it shakes the wilderness, it makes the hinds to calve.' This God that doth all this promiseth to bless his people with peace, outward and inward; for without this inward peace, though he might give them peace, yet could he never bless them with peace as he there undertakes. A sad peace, were it not, to have quiet streets, but cutting of throats in our houses? yet infinitely more sad to have peace both in our streets and houses, but war and blood in our guilty consciences. What peace can a poor creature taste or relish, while the sword of God's wrath lies at the throat of conscience? not peace with God himself. Therefore Christ purchased peace of pardon, to obtain peace of conscience for his pardoned ones, and accordingly hath bequeathed it in the promise to them, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,' John xiv. 27. Where you see he is both the testator to leave, and the executor of his own will, to give out with his own hands what his love hath left believers; so that there is no fear but his will shall be performed to the full, seeing himself lives to see it done. Thirdly, *In semine.* Every believer hath this inward peace in the seed. 'Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,' Psa. xcvii. 11. Where sown, but in the furrows of the believer's own bosom, when principles of grace and holiness were cast into it by the spirit of God? Hence it is called 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness,' Heb. xii. 11. It shoots as naturally from holiness as any fruit in its kind doth from the seed proper to it. It is, indeed, most true, that the seed runs and ripens into this fruit sooner in some than it doth in others. This spiritual harvest comes not alike soon to all, no more than the other that is outward doth; but here is the comfort,—whoever hath a seed-time of grace pass over his soul, shall have his harvest-time also of joy; this law God hath bound himself to as strongly as for the other, which are not to cease while the earth remaineth, Gen. viii. 22; yea, more strongly, for that was to the world in general, not to every particular country, town, or field in these, which may want a harvest, and yet God keep his word; but God cannot perform his

Digitized by Google

promise, if any one particular saint should everlastingly go without his reaping-time. 'He that goeth forth bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him,' Psa. cxxvi. 6. And therefore, you who think so basely of the gospel, and the professors of it, because at present their peace and comfort is not come, know, it is on the way to them, and comes to stay everlastingly with them; whereas your peace is going from you every moment, and is sure to leave you without any hope of returning to you again. Look not how the Christian begins, but ends; the Spirit of God by his convictions comes into the soul with some terrors, but it closeth with peace and joy. As we say of the month of March, it enters like a lion, but goes out like a lamb. 'Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace,' Psa. xxxvii. 36.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, This proves those that think to heal their consciences with other than gospel-balm; who leave the waters of living comfort that flow from this fountain opened in the gospel by Christ, to draw their peace and comfort out of cisterns of their own hewing; and they are two, a carnal cistern, and a legal cistern.

First, Some think to draw their peace out of a carnal cistern. There is not a greater variety of plaisters and foolish medicines used for the cure of the ague of the body, than there is of carnal receipts used by self-deceiving sinners to rid themselves of the shaking ague which the fear of God's wrath brings upon their guilty consciences; some, if they be but a little awakened by the word, and they feel their hearts chill within them, from a few serious thoughts of their wretched undone condition, fall to Felix's physic; who, as soon as his conscience began to be sick at Paul's sermon, had enough of the preacher, and made all the haste he could to get that unpleasing noise out of his head, Acts xxiv.: 'Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way.' Thus many turn their back off God, run as far as they can from those ordinances, that company, or anything else that is likely to grate upon their consciences, and revive the thoughts of their deplored state, which all their care is to forget. Such a one I have heard of, that would not be present at any funeral; could not bear the sight of his own grey hairs, and therefore used a black-lead comb to discolour them, lest by these the thoughts of death (which he so abhorred) should crowd in upon him. A poor cowardly shift, God knows; yet all that this wretch had, and many more have, betwixt them and a hell above-ground in their consciences. Others, their light is so strong, and glares on them so constantly, that this will not do, but wherever they go, though they hear not a sermon in a month, look not on a Bible in a year, and keep far enough from such company as would awake their consciences, yet they are haunted with their own guilt; and therefore they do not only 'go from the presence of the Lord,' as Cain did, Gen. iv. 16, but, as he also made diversion of those musing thoughts which gathered to his guilty conscience, by employing them another way, in 'building a city,' ver. 17, so do they labour to give their consciences the slip in a crowd of worldly businesses. This is the great leviathan that swallows up all the thoughts of heaven and hell in many men's hearts. They are so taken up with that project and this, that conscience finds them not at leisure to exchange a few words with them for a long time together. Conscience is as much kicked and spited among sinners, as Joseph was among the patriarchs. That which conscience tells them, likes them no better than Joseph's dream did his brethren; and this makes many play the merchants with their consciences, as they did with him; which they do by bribing it with the profits of the world. But this physic is found too weak also; and therefore Saul's harp and Nabal's feast is thought on by others; with these they hope to drown their cares, and lay their raving consciences asleep, like some ruffian that is under an arrest for debt, and hath no way, but now to prison he must go, except he can make the sergeant drunk in whose hand he is; which he doth, and so makes an escape. Thus many besot their conscience with the brutish pleasures of sin; and when they have laid it as fast asleep in senseless stupidity as one that is dead drunk, then they may sin without control, till it wakes again. This is the height of that peace which any carnal receipt can help the sinner unto; to give a sleeping potion that shall bind up the senses of conscience for awhile, in which time the wretch may forget his misery, as the condemned man doth when he

Digitized by Google

is asleep; but as soon as it awakes, the horror of his condition is sure again to affright him worse than before. God keep you all from such a cure for your troubles of conscience, which is a thousand times worse than the disease itself. Better to have a dog that will by his barking tell us a thief is in our yard, than one that will sit still, and let us be robbed before we have any notice of our danger.

Secondly, Some draw their peace of conscience from a legal cistern; all the comfort they have is from their own righteousness; this good work and that good duty they bless themselves in when any qualm comes over their hearts; the cordial drink, which they use to revive and comfort themselves with, is drawn not from the satisfaction which Christ by his death hath given to God for them poor sinners, but from the righteousness of their own lives; not from Christ's intercession in heaven for them, but their own good prayers on earth for themselves; in a word, when any spark of disquiet kindles in their consciences (as it were strange if, where so much combustible matter is, there should not, at one time or other, some smothering fire begin in such a one's bosom), then, not Christ's blood, but their own tears are cast on to quench it. Well, whoever thou art that goest this way to work to obtain peace of conscience, I accuse thee as an enemy to Jesus Christ and his gospel. If any herb could be found growing in thy garden to heal the wounds of thy conscience, why did the Lord Christ commend for such a rarity the balm which he came from heaven on purpose to compound with his own blood? why doth he call sinners from all besides himself as comforters of no value, and bid us come to him, as ever we would find rest for our souls? Matt. xi. 28. No, know poor creature, and believe it (while the knowing of it may do thee good), either Christ was an imposter, and the gospel a fable, which I hope thou art not such an infidel, worse than the devil himself, to believe; or else thou takest not the right method of healing thy conscience, wounded for sin, and laying a sure bottom for solid peace in thy bosom. Prayers and tears (repentance I mean), good works and duties, these are not to be neglected; nay, thou canst never have peace without them in thy conscience; yet these do not, cannot procure this peace for thee, because they cannot obtain thy peace with God; and peace of conscience is nothing but the echo of pardoning mercy, which, sounding in the conscience, brings the soul into a sweet rest with the pleasant music it makes. And the echo is but the same voice repeated; so that if prayers and tears, good duties and good works, cannot procure our peace of pardon, then not our peace of comfort. I pray remember I said, you can never have inward peace without these; and yet not have it by these. A wound would hardly ever cure, if not wrapped up from the open air, and also kept clean; yet not these, but the balm cures it. Cease therefore not from praying, and the exercise of any other holy exercise of grace or duty, but from expecting thy peace and comfort to grow from their root; or else thou shuttest thyself out from having any benefit of that true peace which the gospel offers. The one resists the other, like those two famous rivers in Germany, whose streams, when they meet, will not mingle together. Gospel-peace will not mingle and incorporate (as I may so say) with any other; thou must drink it pure and unmixed, or have none at all. 'We,' saith holy Paul for himself, and all other sincere believers, 'are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,' Phil. iii. 3; as if he had said, We are not short of any in holy duties and services; nay, we exceed them, for 'we worship God in the spirit;' but this is not the tap from whence we draw our joy and comfort; we rejoice (fiduciarily) in Christ Jesus, not in the flesh, where that which he called worshipping God in the spirit, now in opposition to Christ, and rejoicing in him, he calls flesh.

Section IV.—Fourthly, They are to be reproved from hence, who do indeed use the balm of the gospel for the healing of conscience-wounds; but they use it very unevangelically. The matter they bottom their peace and comfort on is right and good,—Christ and the mercy of God through him in the promise to poor sinners; what can be said better? But they do not observe gospel-rule and order in the applying it. They snatch the promise presumptuously, force and ravish it, rather than seek to have Christ's consent; like Saul, who was in such haste that he could not stay till Samuel came to sacrifice for him, but

Digitized by Google

boldly falls to work before he comes, directly against the order given him. Thus many are so hot upon having comfort that they will not stay for the Spirit of God to come and sprinkle their consciences with the blood of Christ in gospel order, but profanely do it themselves, by applying the comfort of those promises which indeed at present does not belong to them. O sirs, can this do well in the end? Should he consult well for his health that will not stay for the doctor's direction, but runs into the apothecary's shop, and on his own head takes his physic, without the counsel of the physician how to prepare it, or himself for the taking of it? This every profane wretch doth that lives in sin, and yet sprinkles himself with the blood of Christ, and blesseth himself in the pardoning mercy of God. But let such knew, that as the blood of the paschal lamb was not struck on the Egyptians' doors, but the Israelites', so neither is the blood of Christ to be sprinkled on the obstinate sinner, but sincere penitent. Nay, further, as that blood was not to be spilt on the threshold of an Israelite's door, where it might be trampled on, but on the side-posts; so neither is the blood of Christ to be applied to the believer himself while he lies in any sin unrepented of, for his present comfort. This were indeed to throw it under his foot to be trod upon. David confesseth his sin with shame before Nathan comforts him with the news of a pardon.

CHAPTER X.

WHERE WE HAVE A TRIAL OF OUR PEACE FROM FOUR CHARACTERS OF GOSPEL-PEACE OR COMFORT.

Use 2. LET this doctrine be as a touchstone to the truth of your peace and comfort? Hath it a gospel stamp upon it? The devil hath his false mint of comfort as well as of grace; put thyself therefore to the trial, while I shall lay before you some characters of the peace that Christ in his gospel speaks to his people.

First, Gospel-comfort may be known by the vessel it is poured into, which is a broken heart. The promise is superscribed by name to such, and such only, Isa. lvii. 15: I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' Christ's commission from his Father binds him up; he can comfort none besides: Isa. lxi. 1, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted;' and what he receives himself from the Father, the same he gives to those he sends upon the same errand: First, his Spirit, concerning whom he tells his disciples, that the 'Comforter, when he is come, shall convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,' John xvi. 7. Mark, first of sin. And as for his inferior messengers, they have direction to whom they are to apply the comforts of the gospel: Isa. xxxv. 3, 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not.' And upon their peril be it if they pour this ointment upon the head of an unhumbled sinner! to give such any comfort 'by promising life to him' as he is, God protests against it; he calls it a lie, a 'strengthening the hands of the wicked;' and as much as in them lies, by blowing him up with comfort, to make sure that he shall never have the true peace. Thus you see the order of the gospel in comforting souls. As in needle-work, the dark groundwork is laid before the beautiful colours, — as the statuary cuts and carves his statue before he gilds it, so doth the Spirit of Christ begin with sadness, ends in joy; first cuts and wounds, then heals and overlays the soul with comfort and peace. I hope you do not think I limit the Holy One in his workings to the same degree and measure in all. I have opened my thoughts in another place concerning this: but so far the convincing, humbling work of the Spirit goes in every soul before peace and comfort comes, as to empty the soul of all her false comforts and confidences which she had laid up, that the heart becomes like a vessel whose bottom is beat out, and all the water it held thereby spilled and let out; the sins it loved, now it hates; the hopes and comforts it pleased itself with, they are gone, and the creature left in a desolate, solitary condition; no way now it sees, but perish it must, except Christ be her friend, and interpose between hell and it; to him she

Digitized by Google

therefore makes her moan, as willing to follow his counsel, and to be ordered by his direction, as every patient is by his physician, of whose skill and care he is thoroughly satisfied; this I call the broken heart, which if you be wholly strangers to, your acquaintance is to begin with gospel-peace. I beseech you rest not till you have answer from your consciences. What if they say, was your wine once water? doth your light arise out of darkness? is your peace the issue of a soul conflict and trouble? did you bleed before you were healed? You may hope it is a kindly work of God's gracious Spirit: make much of it, and bless thy God that hath given this wine to cheer thy sad heart. But if thou commencest *per saltum*, hast thy wine before thy pots were filled with water,—thy morning be come before thou hast had thy evening,—thy peace be settled before thy false peace is broken,—thy conscience sound and whole before it is lanced, and the putrid stuff of thy pride, carnal confidence, and other sins thou hast lived in, be let out, thou mayest have some ease for a while; but know it, the Lord Jesus denies it to be his cure. 'The strong man's house is kept in peace,' Luke xi. 21, as well as the good man's. It requires more power to work true sorrow than false joy and peace: a happier man thou wouldst be, if mourning in the distress of a troubled conscience, than dancing about this idol-peace which the devil, thy sworn enemy, mocks thee withal.

Secondly, Gospel-peace is obtained in a gospel-way, and that is twofold. First, In a way of obedience and holy walking: Gal. vi. 16, 'As many as walk by this rule, peace be on them.' Now this rule you may see, ver. 15, to be the rule of the new creature. And what is that but the holy rule of the word? to which the principles of grace planted in the soul of a believer are so fitted, that there is not a more connatural agreement betwixt the eye and light, than betwixt the disposition of this new nature in a saint and the rule of holiness in the word. Now, it is not enough for one to be a new creature, and to have a principle of grace in his bosom, but he must actually walk by this rule, or else he will be to seek for true peace in his conscience. No comfort in the saints is to be found but what the Comforter brings; and he who commands us 'to withdraw from them,' though our brethren, 'that walk disorderly,' 2 Thess. iii. 9, will himself surely withdraw from such, and withhold his comforts, so long as they are disorderly walkers, which they are as long as they walk besides this rule; and therefore, if thou be such a one, say not the Spirit brought thy comfort to thy hand, for he would not bid thee good speed in an evil way; no, he hath been withdrawn as a comforter ever since thou hast withdrawn thy foot from walking by the holy rule. All thy peace which thou pretendest to have in this time is base-born, and thou hast more cause to be ashamed of it than glory in it. It is little credit to the wife that she hath a child when her husband is abroad, and cannot father it; and as little to pretend to comfort when the Spirit of Christ will not own it. Secondly, Gospel-peace is given into the soul in a way of duty and close attendance on God in his ordinances. 'Now the Lord of peace give you peace always by all means,' 2 Thess. iii. 16; that is, bless all means for comforting and filling your souls with inward peace: so that he that drives no trade in ordinances, and brags of his peace and comfort, speaks enough to bring the truth of it into suspicion in the thoughts of sober Christians. I know God can, by immediate illapses of his Spirit, comfort the Christian, and save him the labour of hearing, praying, meditating; but where did he say he would? why may we not as well expect a harvest without sowing and ploughing, as peace without using the means? If we were like Israel in the wilderness, in such a state and posture, wherein the means is cut from us, and not by pride or sloth put from us; as is sometimes the Christian's condition, he is sick, and deprived of ordinances; or, by some other providence as pressing, he is shut out from the help of this means or that; now I should not wonder to see comfort lie as thick in his soul, as manna about the Israelites' tent; but as God would not rain bread any longer, when once they had corn, of which with their labour they might make bread, Josh. v. 11, 12, so neither will the Lord comfort by a miracle when the soul may have it in an ordinance. God could have taught the eunuch, and satisfied him with light from heaven, and never have sent for Philip to preach to him; but he chooseth to do it out of Philip's mouth, rather than immediately out of his own, no doubt to put honour on his ordinance.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, Gospel-peace in the conscience. It is strengthening and restorative; it makes the Christian strong to fight against sin and Satan; the Christian is revived, and finds his strength come, upon a little tasting of this honey; but oh, what a slaughter doth he make of his spiritual enemies, when he hath a full meal of this honey—a deep draught of this wine! Now he goes like a giant refreshed with wine into the field against them. No lust can stand before him; it makes him strong to work. Oh, how Paul laid about him for Christ! 'he laboured more abundantly than them all.' The good man remembered what a wretch he once was, and what mercy he had obtained; the sense of this love of God lay so glowing at his heart, that it inspired him with a zeal for God above his fellow-apostles. This made holy David pray so hard to drink again of this wine, which so long had been locked up from him: 'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit: then I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee,' Psa. li. 12, 13. Pray mark, it was not his liquorish palate after the sweet taste of this wine of comfort that was the only or chief reason why he so longed for it; but the admirable virtue he knew in it, to inspirit and empower him with zeal for God: whereas, the false peace and comfort of hypocrites is more heady than hearty; it leaves them as weak as they were before; yea, it lies rotting, like unwholesome food in the stomach, and leaves a surfeit in their souls, as luscious summer fruits do in the bodies of men, which soon breaks out in loose practices. Thieves commonly spend their money as they get it: and so do hypocrites and formalists their stolen comforts; stay but a little, and you shall find them feasting some lust or other with them. 'I have peace-offerings with me,' saith the religious whore—the hypocritical harlot, 'this day I have paid my vows, therefore came I forth to meet thee,' Prov. vii. 14, 15: she pacifies her conscience, and comforts herself with this religious service she performs; and now, having, as she thought, quit scores with God, she returns to her own lustful trade; yea, emboldens herself from this in her wickedness,—'Therefore came I forth to meet thee;' as if she durst not have played the whore with man, till she had played the hypocrite with God, and stopped the mouth of her conscience with her peace-offering. Look, therefore, I beseech you, very carefully, what effect your peace and comfort have in your hearts and lives. Are you the more humble or proud for your comfort? Do you walk more closely or loosely after your peace? How stand you to duties of worship? are you made more ready for communion with God in them, or do you grow strange to, and unfrequent in them? have you more quickening in them, or lie more formal and lifeless under them? In a word, can you shew that grace and peace grow in thee alike? or doth the one less appear, since thou dost more pretend to the other? By this thou mayest know whether thy peace comes from the Peace-maker, or peace-marrer,—from the God of truth, or father of lies.

Fourthly, Gospel-peace comforts the soul, and that strongly, when it hath no other comfort to mingle with it. It is a cordial rich enough itself, and needs not any other ingredient to be compounded with it. David singles God out by himself: 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee,' Psa. lxxiii. 25. Give David but his God, and let who will take all besides; let him alone to live comfortably, may he but have his love and favour. Hence it is that the Christian's peace pays him in the greatest revenues of joy and comfort, when outward enjoyments contribute least, yea, nothing at all, but bring in matter of trouble. 'But David encouraged himself in his God,' 1 Sam. xxx. 6; you know when that was: if David's peace had not been right and sound, he would have been more troubled to think of God at such a time, than of all his other disasters. 'Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them,' Psa. cxix. 165: this distinguisheth the saint's peace, both from the worldling's and the hypocrite's. First, from the worldling's: his peace and comfort, poor wretch, runs dregs, as soon as creature enjoyments run a-tilt. When poverty, disgrace, sickness, or anything else crosseth him, in that which he fondly doted on, then his night is come, and day shut up in dismal darkness; in which respect it is, that Christ, as I conceive, opposeth his peace to the world's, John xiv. 27; 'My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' Pray mark, Christ is laying in arguments of

Digitized by Google

comfort for his disciples against his departure, which he knew would go so near their hearts. One, amongst the rest, is taken from the difference of that peace and comfort which he leaves them, from what the world gives: as if he had said, If the peace and comfort you have from me lay in such things as the world's peace is made up of—plenty, ease, outward prosperity, and carnal joy—truly then you had reason to be the greatest mourners at my funeral, that ever followed a friend to the grave; for after my departure you are like to have none of these; nay, rather expect trouble and persecution. But know, the peace I leave with you is not in your houses, but hearts; the comfort I give you lies not in silver or gold, but in pardon of sin, hopes of glory, and inward consolations, which the Comforter that is to come from me, to dwell with you, shall, upon my appointment, pay into your bosoms; and this shall outlive all the world's joy. This is such a legacy, as never any left their children. Many a father dying hath, in a farewell speech to his children, wished them all peace and comfort when he should be dead and gone; but who besides Jesus Christ could send a comforter into their hearts, and trust peace and comfort into their bosoms.

Again, It distinguisheth the true Christian's peace from the hypocrite's, who, though he pretends to place his comfort not in the creatures, but in God, and seems to take joy in the interest which he lays claim to have in Christ and the precious promises of the gospel; yet when it comes indeed to the trial, that he sees all his creature-comforts gone, and not like to return any more, (which at this time had his heart, though he would not it should be thought so,) and now he sees he must in earnest into another world, to stand or fall eternally, as he shall then be found in God's own scrutiny to have been sincere or false-hearted in his pretensions to Christ and his grace; truly then his thoughts recoil, his conscience flies in his face, and reproacheth him for spiritual deceit and forgery. Now, soul, speak, is it thus with thee? does thy peace go with thee just to the prison-door, and there leave thee? art thou confident thy sins are pardoned all the while thou art in health and strength, but as soon as ever the sergeant knocks at the door to speak with thee, (death I mean comes in thy sight) then thy thoughts alter, and thy conscience tells thee, he comes to prove thee a liar in thy pretended peace and joy? this is a sad symptom. I know indeed that the time of affliction is a trying time to grace that is true; the sincere Christian for a while may, like a valiant soldier, be beat from his artillery, and the enemy Satan may seem to possess his peace and confidence; yea, so far have some precious saints been carried down the stream of violent temptations, as to question whether their former comforts were from the Holy Spirit the Comforter, or the evil spirit the deceiver; yet there is great difference between the one and the other. First, They differ in their causes: this darkness which sometimes is upon the sincere Christian's spirit in deep distress, comes from the withdrawing of God's lightsome countenance; but the horror of the other from his own guilty conscience, that before was lullabied asleep with prosperity, but now being awakened by the hand of God on him, doth accuse him to have been false with God in the whole course of his profession. It is true some particular guilt may be contracted by the Christian, through negligence, or strong temptation in his Christian course, for which his conscience may accuse him, and may further embitter the present desertion he is in so far, as from those particular miscarriages to fear his sincerity in the rest, though he hath no reason to do it: but his conscience cannot charge him of any hypocritical design to have been the spring that hath set him on work through the whole course of his profession. Secondly, There is something concomitant with the Christian's present darkness of spirit, that distinguisheth it from the hypocrite's horror; and that is the lively working of grace, which then commonly is very visible, when his peace and former comfort are more questioned by him; the less joy he hath from any present sense of the love of God, the more abounding you shall find him in sorrow for his sin, that clouded his joy; the further Christ is gone out of his sight, the more he clings in his love to Christ, and vehmently cries after him in prayer, as we see in Heman, Psa. lxxxviii. 13; 'Unto thee have I cried, O Lord, and in the morning shall my prayers prevent thee.' O the fervent prayers that then are shot from his troubled spirit to heaven, the pangs of affection which are springing after God, and his face and favour! Never did a banished child more desire admittance

Digitized by Google

into his angry father's presence, than he to have the light of God's countenance shine on him, which is now veiled from him. O how he searcheth his heart, studies the Scripture, wrestles with God for to give him that grace, the non-evidence of which at present makes him so question the comforts he hath formerly had: might he but have true grace, he will not fall out with God for want of comfort, though he stays for it till the other world. Never did any woman big with child long more to have the child in her arms that is at present in her womb, than such a soul doth to have that grace which is in his heart, but through temptation questioned by him at present, evidenced to him in the truth of it. Whereas the hypocrite, in the midst of all his horror, doth not, cannot, (till he hath a better heart put into his bosom,) cordially love or desire grace and holiness, for any intrinsical excellency in itself; only as an expedient for escaping the tormentor's hand, which he sees he is now falling into.—They differ in the issue. The Christian, he like a star in the heavens, wades through the cloud, that for a time hides his comfort; but the other, like a meteor in the air, blazeth a little, and then drops into some ditch or other, where it is quenched. Or as the Spirit of God distinguiseth them, Prov. xiii. 9: 'The light of the righteous rejoiceth, but the lamp' (or 'candle,' as in the Hebrew) 'of the wicked is put out.' The sincere Christian's joy and comfort is compared there to the light of the sun, that is climbing higher, while it is muffled up with the clouds from our eye; and by and by, when it breaks out more gloriously, doth rejoice over those mists and clouds, that seemed to obscure it: but the joy of the wicked, like a candle, wastes and spends, being fed with gross fuel of outward prosperity, which in a short time fails, and the wretch's comfort goes out in a snuff at last, past all hope of being lighted again. The Christian's trouble of spirit again is compared to a swooning fainting-fit, which he within awhile recovers, Psa. xl. A qualm comes over the holy man's heart from the thought of his sins in the day of his great distress, ver. 12: 'Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me.' But before the psalm is at an end, after a few deep groans in prayer, ver. 13, 14, he comes again to himself, and acts his faith strongly on God, ver. 17: 'Yet the Lord thinketh on me: thou art my helper and my deliverer.' But the hypocrite's confidence and hope, when once it begins to sink and falter, it dies and perishes, Job xi. 20; 'The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.'

CHAPTER XI.

THAT THE GOSPEL ALONE CAN UNITE THE HEARTS OF MEN TOGETHER IN TRUE PEACE, AND HOW THE GOSPEL DOTH IT.

3. We come now to the third kind of peace, which I called 'a peace of love and unity.' A heavenly grace this is, whereby the minds and hearts of men, that even now jarred and rang backwards, are made tunable each to other, so as to chime all in, to an harmonious consent and concord among themselves. Thus peace in Scripture is frequently taken, as you may see, Mark ix. 50; Heb. xiii. 14; 1 Thes. v. 13. Now the gospel is a gospel of peace, if taken in this notion also, which we shall briefly speak to from this note. *Note.*—That the gospel, and only the gospel can knit the hearts and minds of men together in a solid peace and love. This next to the reconciling us to God and ourselves, is especially designed by Christ in the gospel; and truly those without this, would not fill up the saint's happiness, except God should make a heaven for every Christian by himself to live in. John Baptist's ministry, which was as it were the preface to, and brief contents of the gospel, was divided into these two heads; 'To turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.' Luke i. 16; 'and to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' verse 17. That is, to make them friends with God and one another. This is the natural effect of the gospel, where it is powerfully and sincerely embraced; to unite and endear the hearts of men and women in love and peace together, how contrary soever they were before. This is the strange metamorphosis which the prophet speaks shall be under the gospel, Isa. xi. 8: 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid.' That is, men and women, be-

Digitized by Google

tween whom there was as great feud and enmity as is between those creatures, they shall yet sweetly agree, and lie in one another's bosoms peaceably; and how all this, but by the efficacy of the gospel on their hearts? so ver. 9: 'For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.' Indeed it is in the dark when men fight, and draw upon one another in wrath and fury; if gospel-light comes once savingly in, the sword will soon be put up; the sweet Spirit of love will not suffer these doings where he dwells: and so peculiar is this blessing to the gospel, that Christ appoints it for the badge and cognizance by which they should not only know one another, but even strangers should be able to know them from any other sect and sort of men in the world, John xiii. 35: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.' A nobleman's servant is known as far as he can well be seen, by the coat on his back, whose man he is: so saith Christ, shall all men know you, by your mutual love, that you retain to me and my gospel. If we would judge curiously of wine, what is its natural relish, we must taste of it, before it comes into the huckster's hands, or after it is refined from its lees; so the best way to judge of the gospel, and the fruit it bears, is to taste of it either when it was professed and embraced with most simplicity, and that was, without doubt, in the first promulgation; or, secondly, when it shall have its full effect on the hearts of men, and that is in heaven: in both these, though chiefly the last, this peace will appear to be the natural fruit of the gospel.

First, When the gospel was first preached and embraced, what a sweet harmony of peace, and admirable oneness of heart, was then amongst the holy professors of it, who, but awhile before, were either mere strangers to, or bitter enemies one against another! They lived and loved, as if each Christian's heart had forsaken his own, to creep into his brother's bosom. They alienated their estates, to keep their love entire; they could give their bread out of their own mouths, to put into their brethren's that were hungry; yea, when their love to their fellow-Christians was most costly and heavy, it was least grudged and felt by them: see those blessed souls, Acts ii. 45, 46: 'They sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every one had need; and they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart.' More, they are more merry now they have been emptying of their bags by charity, than if they had come from filling them by worldly traffic. So notorious was the love of Christians in the primitive times, that the very heathens would point at them, as Tertullian saith, and say, 'See how they love one another!' and therefore, if less love and peace be found now amongst Christians, the blame lies not on the gospel, but them; the gospel is as peaceful, but they are *minus evangelici*—less evangelical, as we shall further shew.

Secondly, Look on the gospel as at last in the complement of all in heaven, when the hearts of saints shall be truly gospelized, and the promises concerning the peaceable state of saints have their full accomplishment; then, above all, this peace of the gospel will appear. Here it is put out and in, like a budding flower in the spring, which one warm day opens a little, and another that is cold and sharp shuts again. The silence in this lower heaven, the church on the earth, is but for the space of half an hour, Rev. viii. 1. Now there is love and peace among Christians; anon scandals are given, and differences arise, which drive this sweet spring back; but in heaven it is full blown, and so continues to eternity. There dissenting brethren are made thorough friends, never to fall out: there, not only the wounds of contention is cured, but the scar which is here oft left upon the place is not to be seen on the face of heaven's peace, to disfigure the beauty of it; which made that German divine so long to be in heaven, where, said he, Luther and Zuinglius are perfectly agreed, though they could not on earth.

But I come to give some particular account how the gospel knits the hearts and minds of men in peace together, and why the gospel alone can do this; while I clear one, I shall the other also.

First, This gospel knits the hearts of men together, as it propounds powerful arguments for peace and unity; and, indeed, such as are found nowhere else. It hath cords of love to draw and bind souls together that were never woven in nature's loom; such as we may run through all the topics of morality, and

Digitized by Google

meet with none of them, being all supernatural and of divine revelation, Eph. iv. 3. The apostle exhorts them to 'keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' And how doth he persuade them? ver. 4-7. First, 'There is one body,' but such a one as natural philosophy treats not of, but a mystical one, the church, which consists of several saints, as the natural body of several members; and as it were strange to see one member to fall out with another, which are all preserved in life by their union together, so much more in the mystical body. Again, 'one Spirit;' that is, the same Holy Spirit, which quickens them all that are true saints, and is to the whole number of saints as the soul is to the whole man, informing every part. Now, as it were a prodigious violence to the law of nature if the members, by an intestine war among themselves, should drive the soul out of the body which gives life to them in union together, so much more would it be for Christians to force the Holy Spirit from them by their contentions and strifes; as indeed a wider door cannot easily be opened for him to go out at. Again, it presseth unity, from the 'one hope of our calling,' where hope is put *pro re sperata*, the bliss we all hope for in heaven. There is a day coming, and it cannot be far from us, in which we shall meet lovingly in heaven, and sit at one feast, without one grudging to see what lies on another's trencher: full fruition of God shall be the feast, and peace and love the sweet music that shall sound to it; and what folly is it for us to fight here who shall feast there! draw blood of one another here, that shall so quickly lie in each other's bosoms! Now the gospel invites to this feast, and calls us to this hope. I might run through the other particulars, which are all as purely evangelical as these, 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism,' but enough to have given you a taste.

Secondly, The gospel doth this, as it takes away the cause of that feud and enmity which is among the sons and daughters of men, and they chiefly two: the curse of God on them, and their own lusts in them. First, The feud and hostility that is among men and women is part of that curse which lies on mankind for his apostasy from God. We read, Gen. iii. 17, how the ground was cursed for man's sake: 'Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, saith God; but a far greater curse it was that one man should become as a thorn and brier to fetch blood one of another. Some have a fancy, that the rose grew in paradise without prickles: to be sure, man, had he not sinned, should never have been such a pricking brier as now the best of them is. These thorns that come up so thick in man's dogged, quarrelsome nature, what do they speak but the efficacy of God's curse? The first man that was born in the world proved a murderer; and the first that died, went to his grave by that bloody murderer's hand. May we not wonder as much at the power of God's curse on man's nature, that appeared so soon in Cain's malicious heart, as they did at the sudden withering of the fig-tree blasted by Christ's curse? And truly, it was but just with God, to mingle a perverse spirit among them who had expressed so false a one to him. They deserved to be confounded in their language, and suffered to bite and devour one another, who durst make an attempt upon God himself by their disobedience: very observable is that in Zech. xi. 10, compared with ver. 14. When once the 'staff of beauty,' ver. 10, (which represented God's covenant with the Jews,) was asunder, then presently the 'staff of bands') which signified the brotherhood between Judah and Jerusalem) was cut asunder also. When a people break covenant with God, they must not expect peace among themselves: it is the wisdom of a prince, if he can, to find his enemy work at home. As soon as man fell out with God, behold there is a fire of war kindled at his own door, in his own nature,—no more bitter enemy now to mankind than itself. One man is a wolf, yea, a devil, to another. Now, before there can be any hope of true solid peace among men, this curse must be reversed; and the gospel and only the gospel can do that, where an expedient is found how the quarrel between God and the sinner may be reconciled; which done, the curse ceaseth. A curse is a judiciary doom, whereby God, in wrath, condemns his rebel creature to something that is evil. 'But there is no condemnation to him that is in Christ.' The curse is gone; no arrow now in the bow of threatening; that was shot into Christ's heart, and can never enter into the believer's. God may whip his people, by some unbrotherly unkindness they receive one from another's hands,

Digitized by Google

by way of fatherly chastisement, (and indeed it is as sharp a rod as he can use in his discipline,) the more to make them sensible of their falling out with him. But the curse is gone, and they under a promise of enjoying peace and unity, which they shall, when best for them, have performed to them. Secondly, The internal cause of all the hostility and feud that is to be found amongst men is, lust that dwells in their own bosoms; this is the principle and root that bears all the bitter fruit of strife and contention in the world, Jas. iv. 1: 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?' This breaks the peace with God, ourselves, and others. If there be a fiery exhalation wrapped up in the cloud, we must look for thunder and lightning to follow; if lust in the heart, it will vent itself, though it rends peace of family, church, and kingdom. Now, before there can be a foundation for a firm, solid peace, these unruly lusts of men must be taken down. What peace and quiet can there be while pride, envy, ambition, malice, and such like lusts, continue to sit in the throne, and hurry men at their pleasure? Neither will it be enough for the procuring peace to restrain these unruly passions, and bind them up forcibly; if peace be not made between the hearts of men, it is worth nothing. The chain that ties up the mad dog will in time wear; and so will all the cords break by which men seem at present so strongly bound together, if they be not tied by the heart-strings, and the grounds of the quarrel be there taken away. Now the gospel, and only the gospel, can help us to a plaister, that can draw out of the heart the very core of contention and strife. Hear the apostle, telling us how himself, and others his fellow-saints, got cured of that malicious heart, which once they were in bondage to, Tit. iii. 3: 'We ourselves were sometimes foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures; living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.' Well, what was the physic that recovered them? See ver. 4, 'But after the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' As if he had said, Had not this love of God to us in Christ appeared, and we been thus washed by his regenerating Spirit, we might have lain to this day under the power of those lusts, for all the help that any other could afford us. Mortification is a work of the Spirit, Rom. viii. 13: 'If through the Spirit ye mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live;' and the gospel is the sacrificing knife in the hand of the Spirit. The word is called the 'sword of the Spirit,' as that which he useth to kill and slay sin within the hearts of his people.

Thirdly, As the gospel lays the axe to the root of bitterness and strife to stub that up; so it fills the hearts of those that embrace it with such gracious principles, as incline to peace and unity; such are self-denial, that prefers another in honour before himself, and will not jostle for the wall; long-suffering, a grace which is not easily moved and provoked; gentleness, which if moved by any wrong, keeps the doors open for peace to come in at again, and makes him easy to be entreated. See a whole bundle of these sweet herbs growing in one bed, Gal. v. 22: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness.' Mark, I pray, this is not fruit that grows in every hedge, but fruit of the Spirit: fruit that springs from gospel-seed. As the stones in the quarry, and cedars as they grow in the wood, would never have lain close and comely together in the temple; so neither could the one cut and polish, nor the other hew and carve themselves into that fitness and beauty, which they all had in that stately tabric; no, that was the work of men gifted of God for that purpose; neither can men and women, with all their skill and tools of morality, square and frame their hearts, so as to fall in lovingly together into one holy temple. This is the work of the Spirit, and that also with this instrument, and chisel of the gospel, to do, partly by cutting off the knottiness of our churlish natures by his mortifying grace: as also carving, polishing, and smoothing them with those graces which are the emanations of his own sweet, meek, and Holy Spirit.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PEACE THAT IS AMONG SAINTS, AND WHICH IS AMONG THE WICKED; THE GREATNESS OF THEIR SIN, WHO ARE MINISTERS OF PEACE AND YET STIR UP STRIFE; AND THE REASON WHY THERE IS NO MORE PEACE AND UNITY AMONG SAINTS IN THIS LIFE.

Use 1. FIRST, This helps us what to think of that peace, and love, which sometimes is to be found among the wicked of the world. It is not true peace, and solid love, because they are strangers to the gospel, which alone can unite hearts together. What then shall we call their peace? In some it is a mere conspiracy: 'Say ye not a confederacy to all them to whom this people shall say confederacy,' Isa. viii. 12. The peace of some is rather founded in wrath to the saints than love among themselves. They are united, but how? no other way than Samson's foxes, to do mischief to others, rather than good to themselves. Two dogs that are worrying one another, can leave off to run both after a hare that comes by them; who, when the chase is over, can fight as fiercely as before. 'In the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together, for before they were at enmity between themselves,' Luke xxiii. 12. Again, the peace and unity of others is founded on some base lust that ties them together; thus shall you see a knot of good fellows, as they miscall themselves, sit over the pot with abundance of seeming content in one another; and a pack of thieves, when upon a wicked design, jug and call one another together, (as partridges their fellows,) saying, 'Come with us, cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse,' Prov. i. 14. Here now is peace and unity; but alas! they are only brethren in iniquity. Thirdly, where it is not thus gross; as it cannot indeed be denied but there are some that never felt the power of the gospel, so as to be made new creatures by it, who yet hold very fair quarter one with another, and correspond together, and that not on so base and sordid an account, among whom such offices of love are reciprocated, as do much sweeten their lives, and endear them one to another; and for this they are much beholden to the gospel, which doth civilize oft, where it doth not sanctify. But this is a peace so fundamentally defective, that it doth not deserve the name of true peace. First, It is *in cortice, non in corde;* superficial and external, not inward and cordial: we may say, rather their lusts are chained from open war, than their hearts changed into inward love. As the beasts agreed in the ark pretty well, yet kept their hostile nature, so do unregenerate men. Secondly, It is unsanctified peace. First, Because while they seem to have peace with one another, they have not peace with God; and it is peace with God takes away the curse. Secondly, Because it proceeds from unsanctified hearts; it is the altar that sanctifies the gift; the heart, the unity, *Amicitia non est nisi inter bonos.* A heathen could say, true love and friendship can only be between good men; but alas, he knew not what made a good man. When God intends in mercy to make the hearts of men one, he first makes them new, Ezek. xi. 19: 'And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you;' the peace of the right kind is a fruit of the Spirit, and that sanctifies before it unites. Thirdly, Because the end that all such propound in their love is carnal, not spiritual. As Austin did not admire Cicero for his eloquence and oratory, so much as he did undervalue and pity him, because the name of Jesus Christ was not to be found in him; so this draws a black line upon carnal men's peace and unity; nothing of God and Christ in it. Is it his glory they aim at? Christ's command that binds them to the peace? No, alas! here is the still voice, but God is not in it; their own quiet and carnal advantage is the *primum mobile;* peace and unity are such good guests, and pay so well for their entertainment, that this makes men who have no grace, if they have but their wits left, desirous to keep up an external peace among themselves. In a word, it is a peace that will not long last, because it wants a strong cement; stones may awhile lie together without mortar, but not long. The only lasting cement for love is the blood of Christ, as Austin saith of his friend Alypius and himself, they were *sanguine Christi glutinati.*

Use 2. Secondly, Is the gospel a gospel of peace in this sense, as taken for unity and love? This dips their sin into a deep dye, who abuse the gospel to a quite contrary end, and make it their instrument to promote strife and con-

Digitized by Google

tention withal; such the apostle speaks of, Phil. i. 15: 'Some, indeed, preach Christ out of envy and strife.' The gospel of peace is a strange text, one would think to preach division and raise strife from; and the pulpit as strange a mount to plant the flattering pieces of contention on. O how strangely do these men forget their Lord that sent them, who is a prince of peace: and their work, which is not to blow a trumpet of sedition and confusion, or sound an alarm to battle, but rather a joyful retreat from the bloody fight, wherein their lusts, had engaged them against God and one another! Indeed, there is a war they are to proclaim, but it is only against sin and Satan; and I am sure we are not fit to march out against them, till we can agree among ourselves. What would the prince think of that captain, who, instead of encouraging his soldiers to fall on with united forces as one man against the common enemy, should make a speech to set his soldiers together by the ears among themselves? Surely he would hang him up for a traitor. Good was Luther's prayer, *A doctore glorioso, a pastore contentioso, et inutilibus quæstionibus, liberet ecclesiam Deus.* From a vain-glorious doctor, a contentious pastor, and nice questions, the Lord deliver his church. And we in these sad times have reason to say as hearty an Amen to it as any since his age. Do we not live in a time when the church is turned into a sophist's school? where such a wrangling and jangling hath been, that the most precious truths of the Gospel are lost already to many, whose eyes are blinded with the dust these contentions have raised, and they have at last fairly disputed themselves out of all their sober principles; as some ill husbands that light among cunning gamesters, and play all their money out of their purses? O woe to such vile men, who have prostituted the gospel to such devilish ends. God may have mercy on the cheated souls to bring them back to the love of the truth. But for the cheaters, they are gone too far towards hell, that we can look for their return.

Use 3. Thirdly, This gives us the reason why there is no more peace and unity among the saints themselves; the gospel cannot be faulty, that breathes peace. No; it is not because they are gospellers, but because they are but imperfectly gospellized, that they are no more peaceful; the more they partake of the spirit of the gospel, the less will they be hunted with the evil spirit of contention and strife. The best of saints are in part evangelical in two particulars, from which comes all the unkind quarrellings, and unbrotherly contests among them. First, In their judgments, 'They know but in part, and prophecy but in part,' 1 Cor. xiii. 9. He that pretends to more, boasts without his measure, and doth thereby discover what he denies, his ignorance (I mean in the gospel). And this defect and craze, that is in the saints' judgment, exposeth them sometimes to drink in principles that are not evangelical. Now these are they that make the bustle, and disturb their peace and unity. All truths are reducible to an unity; like lines they lovingly meet in one centre, the God of truth; and so far from jostling and clashing, that (as stones in an arch) they uphold one another. And they which so sweetly agree in one, cannot learn us to divide. No, it is this stranger, Error, that creeps in among the saints, and will needs be judge. This breaks the peace, and kindles a fire in the house, that in a while, if let alone, will be seen at the house-top. Wholesome food makes no disturbance to a healthful body; but corrupt food doth presently make the body feverish and untoward, and then, when the man is distempered, no wonder if he begins to be pettish and peevish; we have seen it by woful experience. Those from whom we had nothing but sweetness and love, while they fed on the same dish of gospel-truth with us, how strangely froward are they grown, since they have taken down some unevangelical and erroneous principles! that we know not well how to carry ourselves towards them, they are so captious and quarrelsome; yea, at the very hearing of the word, if they have not yet forgot the way to the ordinance, what a distasteful behaviour do many of them shew! as if every word went against their stomach. Let us not blame the gospel; it is innocent as to these sad contentions among us. Paul tells us where to find a father for this brat of strife. See at whose door he directs us to lay it, Rom. xvi. 17: 'Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learned.' Where, pray observe, how he clears the gospel; they never learned it in Christ's school; and then tacitly implies they have some-

Digitized by Google

where else, from some false teacher, and false doctrine or other. Mark them, saith he; as if he had said, observe them well, and you shall find them tainted some way or other. They had been warming themselves at Satan's fire, and from thence have brought a coal with them that does the mischief. Secondly, Christians are in part unevangelical in their hearts and lives. The whole root of sin is not stubbed up at once, no wonder some bitter taste remains in the fruit they bear. Saints in heaven shall be all grace, and no sin in them; and then they shall be all love also; but here they are part grace, part corruption, and so their love is not perfect. How can they be fully soldered together in unity never to fall out, as long as they are not so fully reconciled to God (in point of sanctification), but now and then there happens some breaches between them and God himself? And the less progress the gospel hath made in their hearts to mortify lusts, and strengthen grace, the less peace and love is to be expected among them. The apostle concludes from the contentions among the Christians at Corinth, that they were of little growth in grace; such as were not past the child-spoon and meat, 1 Cor. iii. 2: 'I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able, for ye are yet carnal.' Nay, he conceives this to be so clear evidence, that he appeals to their consciences if it be not so, ver. 3: 'For whereas there is among you envyings, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?' But as grace strengthens, and the gospel prevails on the hearts of Christians, so does love and a spirit of unity increase with it. We say, Older and wiser; though children, when young, do scratch and fight, yet when they get up into years they begin to agree better. *Omne invalidum est natura querulum;* those that are young and weak are peevish and quarrelsome. Age and strength brings wisdom to overcome those petty differences that now cannot be borne. In the controversy between Abraham and Lot's servants, Abraham, who was the elder and stronger Christian, he was most forward for peace, so as to crave it at the hands of his nephew, every way his inferior. Paul, who was a Christian higher by the head than others, O how he excelled in love! He saith of himself, 1 Tim. i. 14: 'The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which is in Jesus Christ.' Where, saith Calvin, *Fides incredulitati opponitur; dilectio in Christo, sævitiæ, quam exercuerat adversus fideles.* Faith is opposed to his former obstinate unbelief when a Pharisee; love in Christ Jesus, to the cruelty he expressed against Christians, when, breathing slaughter, he went on a persecuting errand to Damascus. Now he was as full of faith, as then of unbelief; now as fire-hot of love to the saints, as then of cruelty against them. But that I quote chiefly the place for is, to see how this pair of graces thrive and grow together; if abundant in faith, then abundant in love.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS TO MAINTAIN PEACE AMONG THEMSELVES, AND PROMOTE IT TO THEIR UTMOST, FROM THREE ARGUMENTS.

Use 3. THIRDLY, It brings a seasonable exhortation to all the saints, that they would nourish peace what they can among themselves. You all profess to have been baptized into the spirit of the gospel, but you do not shew it, when you bite and snarl at one another. The gospel, that makes wolves and lambs agree, doth not teach the lambs to turn wolves, and devour each other. Our Saviour told the two disciples whose choler was so soon up, that they would be fetching fire from heaven, to go on their revengeful errand, that they little thought from what hearth that wild-fire of their passion came: 'Ye know not what spirit ye are of,' Luke ix. 56. As if he had said, such fiery, wrathful speeches do not suit with the meek Master you serve, nor with the gospel of peace he preacheth to you. And if the gospel will not allow us to pay our enemies in their own coin, and give them wrath for wrath, then much less will it suffer brethren to spit fire at one another's face. No; when any such embers of contention begin to smoke among Christians, we may know who left the spark; no other but Satan: he is the great kindle-coal of all their contentions. If there be a tempest, not in the air, but in the spirits of Christians, and the wind of their passions be high and loud, it is easy to tell who is the conjuror.

Digitized by Google

O it is the devil that is practising his black art upon their lusts, which yet are so unmortified as gives him too great an advantage of raising many times sad storms of division and strife among them. Paul and Barnabas set out in a calm together, but the devil sends a storm after them, such a storm as parted them in the midst of their voyage, Acts xv. 39: 'And the contention was so sharp betwixt them, that they departed asunder one from the other. 'There is nothing (next to Christ and heaven) that the devil grudges believers more than their peace and mutual love: if he cannot rend them from Christ, stop them from getting heaven, yet he takes some pleasure to see them go thither in a storm, like a shattered fleet severed one from another, that they may have no assistance from, nor comfort of each other's company all the way; though where he can divide, he hopes to ruin also, well knowing this to be the most probable means to effect it; one ship is easier taken than a squadron. A town, if it can be but set on fire, the enemy may hope to take it with more ease; let it therefore be your great care to keep the devil's spark from your powder. Certainly peace among Christians is no small mercy, that the devil's arrows fly so thick at its breast. Something I would fain speak to endear this mercy to the people of God. I love, I confess, a clear and still air, but above all in the church among believers; and I am made the more sensible what a mercy this would be, by the dismal consequence of these divisions and differences that have for some years together troubled our air, and filled us with such horror and confusion, that we have not been much unlike that land called *Terra del Fuego*, the Land of Smoke, because of the frequent flashings of lightnings and abundance of smoke found there. What can I compare error to better than smoke? and contention to than fire? a kind of emblem of hell itself, where the flames and darkness meet together to increase the horror of the place. But to press the exhortation a little closer, give me leave to provoke you by three arguments to peace and unity.

SECTION I.—First, For Christ's sake. And methinks, when begging for his sake I should have no nay. When you pray to God, and do but use his name in the business, you are sure to speed. And why should not an exhortation, that woos you for Christ's sake, move your hearts to duty, as a prayer put up by you in his name moves God's heart to mercy? Indeed, how canst thou in faith use Christ's name as an argument to unlock God's heart to thee, which hath not so much credit with thyself as to open thy own heart into a compliance with a duty which is so strongly set on his heart to promote among his people? As appears,

First, By the solemn charge he gave his disciples in this particular, John xiii. 34: 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.' I pray observe, how he prepares their hearts to open readily, and bid this commandment kindly welcome: he sets his own name upon it. 'A new commandment I give unto you.' As if he had said, let this command, though as old as any other, Lev. xix. 18, yet go under my name in an especial manner: when I am gone, and the fire of strife begins at any time among you, remember what particular charge I now give you, and let it quench it presently. Again, observe how he delivers this precept, and that is by way of gift and privilege; 'A new commandment I give unto you. Indeed this was Christ's farewell sermon, the very strokings of that milk which he had fed them withal; never dropped a sweeter discourse from his blessed lips; he saved his best wine till the last. He was now making his will, and amongst other things that he bequeathes his disciples, he takes this commandment, as a father would do his seal-ring off his finger, and gives it to them. Again, thirdly, he doth not barely lay the command before them, but to make it the more effectual, he annexeth in a few words the most powerful argument why they should, as also the most clear and full direction how they might do this, that is possible to be given: 'As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.' Oh, Christians! what may not the love of Christ command you? If it were to lay down your lives for him that loved you to death, would you deny them? and shall not this his love persuade you to lay down your strifes and divisions? This speaks enough how much weight he laid upon this commandment; but then

Digitized by Google

again observe, how Christ, in the same sermon, over and over again reminds them of this; which if he had not been very solicitous of, should not have had so large a room in his thoughts then, when he had so little time left, in which he was to crowd and sum up all the heavenly counsel and comfort that he desired to leave with them before his departure. Nay, so great weight he lays on this, that he seems to lock up his own joy and theirs together in the care that they should take about this one command of loving one another, John xv. 11: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you; and that your joy might be full.' What these things were appears by the preceding verse: 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.' These were the things that he spake of in order to his joy in them, and theirs in him, that they would keep his commandments. Now, to let them know, how high a place their obedience to this particular command of love and unity had in his heart, and how eminently it conduced to the continuing his joy in them, and filling up their own; he chooseth that above any for his instance, in order to what he had said, as you may see, ver. 12, 'This is my commandment that ye love one another.' Observe still, how Christ appropriates this commandment to himself. 'This is my commandment,' as if he would signify to them, that as he had one disciple, who went by the name of the disciple whom Jesus loved; so he would have a darling commandment, in which he takes some singular delight, and that this should be it, 'their loving one another.' But we are not yet at the last link of this golden chain of Christ's discourse. When he hath put some more warmth into their affections to this duty, by exposing his own love to them in the deepest expression of it, even to die for them, ver. 13, then he comes on more boldly, and tells them he will own them for his friends, as they are careful to observe what he had left in charge with them, ver. 14: 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.' And now, taking it for granted that he had prevailed upon them, and they would walk in unity and love as he had commanded them, he cannot conceal the pleasure that he takes therein, yea, and in them for it. Verse 15, he opens his heart to them, and locks no secret from them: yea, bids them go and open their heart to God, and be free to him, as he is to them, verse 16; and mark from what blessed hour all this familiarity that they are admitted to bears date: 'From henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doth;' that is, from the time that you walk dutifully to me, and lovingly to one another. One would think now he had said enough; but he thinks not so. In the very next words he is at it again, ver. 17: These things I command you, that you love one another:' as if all he had left else in charge with them had been subservient to this.

Secondly, A second thing that speaks Christ's heart deeply engaged in the promoting of love and unity among Christians is, his fervent prayer for this. Should you hear a preacher with abundance of vehemency press a grace or duty upon the people, in his pulpit, and as soon as the sermon is done, you should go under his closet window, and hear him as earnestly wrestling with God that he would give his people what he had so zealously pressed upon them, you would easily believe the man was in earnest. Our blessed Saviour hath taught us ministers whither to go when we come out of the pulpit, and what to do; no sooner hath he done his sermon to them, but he is at prayer with God for them. And what he insisted on most in preaching, he enlargeth most upon in prayer: unity and peace was the legacy he desired so much to leave with them, and this is the boon he puts in strongly with God to bestow on them, John xvii. 11: 'Father, keep through thine own power those that thou hast given me;' and why all this care? 'that they might be one, as we are.' As if he had said, Father, did we ever fall out? was there ever discord betwixt us? why then should they who are thine and mine disagree? So, ver. 21, and again, verse 23, he is pleading hard for the same mercy. And why so often? Is it so hardly wrung from God, that Christ himself must tug so often for it? No, sure; but as Christ said of the voice that came from heaven, John xii. 30, 'This voice came not from me, but for your sakes,' so may I say here, this ingeminated zeal of Christ for his people's unity and love was for their sakes. First, He would by this raise the price of this mercy in their thoughts: that sure is worth their care, which he counted worth his

Digitized by Google

redoubled prayer (when not a word was spoken for his own life), or else he misplaced his zeal, and improved not his time with God, for the best advantage of his people. Secondly, He would make divisions appear more scareful and dreadful things to his people, by putting in so many requests to God for preventing them. Certainly, if Christ had known one evil worse than another like to come upon his people at his departure, he would have been so true and kind to his children, as to deprecate that above all, and keep that off. He told his children what they must look for at the world's hand,—all manner of sufferings and torments, that their wit could help their malice to devise; yet Christ prays, not so much for immunity from these, as from unbrotherly contentions among themselves; he makes account, if they can agree together, and be in love, saint with saint, church with church, they have a mercy that will alleviate the other and make it tolerable, yea, joyous; this heavenly fire of love among themselves will quench the flames of their persecutors, at least the horror of them. In a word, Christ would so strengthen our faith to ask boldly for that which he hath bespoke for us, so also aggravate the sin of contention to such a height, that all who have any love to Christ, when they shall see that they cannot live in strife, but they must sin against those prayers which Christ with strong cries put up for peace and unity, they may tremble at the thoughts of it.

Thirdly, The price that Christ gave for the obtaining of this peace and unity. As Christ went from preaching up peace to pulling down peace from heaven by prayer; so he went from praying to paying for it. Indeed, Christ's prayers are not a beggar's prayers as ours are; he prays his father that he may only have what he pays for. He was now on the way to the place of payment, Calvary, where his blood was the coin he laid down for this peace. I confess peace with God was the chief pearl that this wise merchant, Christ, bought up for his people. But he had this in his eye also; and, therefore, the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which is the commemoration feast of Christ's death, as it seals our peace with God, so it signifies our love one with another, 1 Cor. x. And need I now give you any account why our dear Lord pursued this design so close, of knitting his people in peace and unity together? Truly the church is intended by Christ to be his house, in which he means to take up his rest; and what rest could he take in a house all on fire about him? it is his kingdom; and how can his laws be obeyed, if all his subjects be in a hubbub one against another? *inter arma silent legis.* In a word, his church are a people that are called out of the world to be a praise to him in the sight of the nations; as Peter saith, 'God did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name,' Acts xv. 14; that is, a people for his honour: but a wrangling, divided people would be little credit to the name of Christ. Yea, such, where they are found, (and where, alas! are they not to be found?) they are to the name of Christ as smoke and dirt to a fair face, they dirty and disfigure Christ; so that the world will not acknowledge him to be who he saith he is; they lead them even into temptation, to think basely of Christ and his gospel, John xvii. 23. Christ prays his people may be made perfect in one; and mark his argument, 'that the world may know that thou hast sent me.' Whose heart bleeds not to hear Christ blasphemed at this day by so many black mouths? and what hath opened them more than the saints' divisions?

SECTION II.—Secondly, The second argument shall be taken from yourselves. For your own sakes live in peace and unity. Consider your obligations to love and unity: your relations call for it. If believers, Paul tells you your kindred, Gal. iii. 27: 'Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus. Not only children of God, so are all by creation, but by faith in Christ Jesus also. Christ, he is the foundation of a new brotherhood to believers. O Christians, consider how near you are set one to another; you were conceived in the same womb of the church, begot by the same seed of the word, to this new creation, whereby, as one saith, you become brethren of the whole blood; and, therefore, there should be the more unity and dear affection among you than any other. Joseph's heart went out more to Benjamin than any of the rest of his brethren, because he was his brother, both by father and mother; if you fall out, who shall agree? What is it that can rationally break your peace? Those things which used to be bones of contention, and occasion squabbling

Digitized by Google

among other brethren, Christ hath taken care to remove them all; so that of all others, your quarrellings are most childish, yea, sinful. Sometimes one child finds himself grieved at the partiality of his parents' affection more set on some others than himself; and this makes him envy them, and they despise him; but there is no such fondling in God's family; all are dear alike to Christ, Eph. v. 2: 'Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us, and hath given himself for us;' that is, for one as well as another. Christ in the church is like to the soul in the body; he is *totus in toto, et totus in qualibet parte.* Every member in Christ hath whole Christ,—his whole heart and love, as if there were none besides himself to enjoy it. Again, among men, though the father shews not so much partiality in his affection, yet often great inequality in the distribution of his estate; though all are children, yet not all heirs, and this sows the seed of strife among them; as Jacob found, by woful experience. But Christ hath made his will so, that they are all provided for alike, called therefore the 'common salvation,' Jude 3, and 'the inheritance of the saints in light,' Col. i. 12, for the community. All may enjoy their happiness without jostling with, or prejudicing one of another, as millions of people who look on the same sun, and at the same time, and none stand in another's light. Methinks that speech of Christ looks a little this way, John xvii. 22: 'The glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one.' By glory there, I would understand heaven's glory, principally; now saith Christ, 'I have given it; that is, in reversion, I have given it them; not this or that favourite, but them;' I have laid it out as the portion of all sincere believers: and why? 'that they may be one;' that all squabbles may be silenced, and none may envy another for what he hath above him, when he sees glory is his. It is true, indeed, some difference there is in a Christian's outward garb; some poor, some rich; and in common gifts also, some have more of them, some less. But are these *tanti* of such weight to commence a war upon, among those that wait for the same heaven? If the father clothes all his children in the same cloth, it were sad to see them stab one another, because one hath a lace more than the other; nay, because one's lace is red, and the other's is green; for indeed the quarrel among Christians is, sometimes, not for having less gifts than another, but because not the same in kind, though another as good and useful, which possibly he wants whom we envy.

Secondly, Consider where you are, and among whom. Are you not in your enemies' quarters; if you fall out, what do you but kindle a fire for them to warm their hands by? Aha! so would we have it, say they. The sea of their rage will weaken this bank fast enough, you need not cut it for them. The unreasonableness of the strife betwixt Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's is aggravated by the near neighbourhood of the heathens to them, Gen. xiii. 7: 'And there was a strife between Abraham's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and Perizzite dwelled in the land.' To fall out while these idolaters looked on, this would be a town-talk presently, and put themselves and their religion both to shame. And, I pray, who have been in our land, all the while the people of God have been scuffling? Those that have curiously observed every uncomely behaviour among them, and told all the world of it; such as have wit and malice enough to make use of it for their wicked purposes. They stand on tiptoes to be at work, only we are not yet quite laid up and disabled (by the soreness of those our wounds which we have given ourselves) from withstanding their fury. They hope it will come to that; and then they will cure us of our own wounds, by giving one, if they can, that shall go deep enough to the heart of our life, gospel and all. O Christians, shall Herod and Pilate put you to shame? They clapped up a peace to strengthen their hands against Christ; and will not you unite against your common enemy? It is an ill time for mariners to be fighting, when an enemy is boring a hole at the bottom of their ship.

Thirdly, Consider the sad consequences of your contentions. First, You put a stop to the growth of grace. The body may as well thrive in a fever, as the soul prosper when on a flame with strife and contention. No, first, this fire in the bones must be quenched, and brought into its natural temper; and so must this unkindly heat be slaked among Christians, before either can grow. I pray observe that place, Eph. iv. 15: 'But speaking the truth in love,' or being sincere in love, 'may grow up into him in all things.' The apostle is upon a

Digitized by Google

cure, shewing how souls that at present are weak, and their graces rather wan and withered, than growing, may come to thrive and flourish; and the receipt he gives is a composition of these two rare drugs, sincerity and love; preserve these, and all will go well; as ver. 16, where the whole body is said 'to edify itself in love.' There may be preaching, but no edifying, without love. Our times are a sad comment upon this text. Secondly, You cut off your trade with heaven, at the throne of grace; you will be little in prayer to God, I warrant you, if much in squabbling with your brethren. It is impossible to go from wrangling to praying, with a free spirit. And if you should be so bold as to knock at God's door, you are sure to have cold welcome, Matt. v. 24: 'Leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' God will not have the incense of prayer put to such strange fire; nor will he eat of our leavened bread, taste of any performance soured with malice and bitterness of spirit. First, the peace was renewed, and a covenant of love and friendship struck between Laban and Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 44; and then, ver. 54, 'Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread.' The very heathens thought no serious business could be well done by quarrelling spirits. Therefore the senators of Rome used to visit the temple dedicated *Jovi depositorio*, because there they did *deponere inimicitias*, lay down all their feuds and controversies, before they went into the senate to consult of state affairs. Durst not they go to the senate till friends, and dare we go up to God's altar, bow our knees to him in prayer, while our hearts are roiled and swollen with anger, envy, and malice? O God, humble us! Thirdly, As we cut off our trade with heaven, so with one another; when two countries fall out, whose great interest lies in their mutual traffic, they must needs both pinch by the war. Truly, Christians' great gains come in by their mutual commerce; and they are the richest Christians commonly, who are seated with the greatest advantage for this trade. As no nation hath all their commodities of their own growth, but needs some merchandize with others; so there is no Christian that could well live without borrowing from his brethren. There is that 'which every joint supplieth according to the effectual working in the measure of every part,' Eph. iv. 16. Paul himself is not so well laid in, but he hopes to get something more than he hath from the meanest of those he preached to; he tells the Christians at Rome, chap. i., he longs as much to see them, as to impart some spiritual gift to them, ver. 11; so saith he, 'that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me,' ver. 12; yea, he hopes to be 'filled with their company, Rom. xv. 24. As a man is filled with good cheer, he hopes to make a feast of their company. Now contentions and divisions spoil all intercourse among believers; they are as baneful to Christian communion, as a great pestilence or plague is to the trade of a market town. Communication flows from communion, and communion that is founded upon union. The church grows under persecution; that sheds the seed all over the field, and brings the gospel where else it had not been heard of; but divisions and contentions, like a furious storm, washes the seed out of the land, with its heart, fatness, and all. Fourthly, You do not only hazard the decay of grace, but growth of sin. Indeed it shews there is more than a little corruption got within doors already, but it opens the door to much more; James iii., 'If ye have bitter envying, and strife, glory not:' that is, do not think you are such good Christians; this stains all your other excellences; had ye the knowledge and gifts of holy angels, yet this would make you look more like devils than them; he gives the reason, ver. 16: 'For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work. Contention is the devil's forge, in which if he can but give a Christian a heat or two, he will not doubt but to soften him for his hammer of temptation. Moses himself, when his spirit was a little hot, 'spake unadvisedly with his lips.' It must needs be an occasion of much sinning, which renders it impossible for a man, while in his distemper, to do any one righteous action. 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,' James i. 20. Now, what a sad thing is it for Christians to stay long in that temper in which they can do no good to one another, but provoke lust? Fifthly, They are prognostics of judgment coming. A lowering sky speaks foul weather at hand; and mariners look for a storm at sea, when the waves begin to swell, and utter a murmuring noise. Hath there been nothing like these

Digitized by Google

among us, what can we think, but a judgment is breeding by the lowering countenances of Christians, their swellings of heart, and discontented passions vented from their swollen spirits, like the murmuring of waters, or rumbling of thunder in the air before a tempest? When children fight and wrangle, now is the time they may expect their father to come, and part them with his rod. Mal. iv. 6; 'He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I smite the earth with a curse;' strife and contention set a people next door to a curse. God makes account he brings a heavy judgment upon a people, when himself leaves them. If the master leaves the ship, it is near sinking indeed; and truly no readier way to send him going, than by contentions; these smoke him out of his own house. 'Be of one mind,' saith the apostle, 'live in peace, and the God of peace shall be with you,' 2 Cor. xiii. 11; implying if they did not live in peace, they must not look to have his company long with them. God was coming in Moses with a great salvation to the Israelites, and as an earnest of the good services he was to do for them, he begins to make peace between two discontented brethren as they strove; but his kindness was not accepted, and this was the occasion of many years' misery more, that they endured in Egypt. 'Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian,' Acts vii. 29; and no news of deliverance for the space of forty years after, ver. 30. And have not our dissensions, or rather our rejecting these overtures, which God by men of healing spirits hath offered for peace, been the cause why mercy hath fled so fast from us, and we left to groan under these sad miseries that are upon us at this day? and who knows how long? O who can think what a glorious morning shone upon England in that famous parliament, begun 1640, and not weep and weep again to see our hopes for a glorious reformation, that opened with them, now shut up in blood and war, contention and confusion? miseries, too, like the fire and brimstone that fell from heaven upon those unhappy cities of the plain.

SECTION III.—Thirdly and lastly, O labour for peace and unity for other's sake. I mean those who at present are wicked and ungodly, among whom ye live. We are not, saith Austin, to despair of the wicked, but do our utmost that they may be made good and godly. *Quia numerus sanctorum, semper de numero impiorum auctus est.* Because God ever calls his number out of the heap and multitude of the ungodly world. Now, no more winning means to work upon them, and pave a way for their conversion, than to commend the truths and ways of God to them, by the amiableness of your love and unity that profess the same. This is the cummin-seed that would draw souls like doves to the windows. This is the gold to overlay the temple of God (the church) so as to make all in love with its beauty that look into it. Every one is afraid to dwell in a house haunted with evil spirits. And hath hell a worse than the spirit of division? O Christians, agree together, and your number will increase. It is said, Acts ii. 46: 'They continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.' And mark what follows, ver. 47: 'They had favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.' The world was so great a stranger to love and peace, that it was amused, and set of considering what heavenly doctrine that was which could so mollify men's hearts, plane their rugged natures, and join them so close in love together, and were the more easily persuaded to adopt themselves into that true family of love. But alas, when this gold became dim (I mean peace among Christians faded) the gospel lost credit in the world, and the doctrine of it came under more suspicion in their thoughts, who seeing such clefts gape in her walls, were more afraid to put their heads under its roof, Cant. ii. 7: 'I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor wake my love till he please.' Master Cotton on the place, by 'the roes and hinds of the field,' (which are fearful creatures, easily scared away, yet otherwise willing to feed with the sheep), takes the Gentiles to be meant inclinable to embrace the Jewish religion, but very soon scared away by the troublesome state of it, or any offensive carriage of the Jews. And what more offensive carriage than divisions and strifes? see them joined together, Rom. xvi. 17: 'Mark them which cause divisions and offences.' If divisions, then there are sure to be offences taken, and many possibly hardened in their

Digitized by Google

sins thereby. Do not your hearts tremble to lay the stumbling-block for any to break his neck over? to roll the stone over any poor sinner's grave, and seal him down in it, that he never have a resurrection to grace here, or glory hereafter? As you would keep yourselves free of the blood of those that die in their sins, take heed of lending anything by your divisions to the hardening of their souls in their impenitency.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, The fourth and last sort of peace which I thought to have spoken of is, a peace with all the creatures, even the most fierce and cruel. I called it a peace of indemnity and service. This Adam in his primitive state enjoyed: while he was innocent, all the creatures were innocent and harmless to him; the whole creation was at his service; no mutinous principle was found in any creature that did incline it in the least to rebel against him. When God sent the beasts of the field and fowls of the air to receive names from him, it was that they should do their homage to him, and acknowledge him as their lord; and that he, by exercising that act of authority over them (in giving them names) might have an experiment of his perfect (though not absolute and independent) dominion over them. But no sooner did man withdraw his allegiance from God, but all the creatures (as if they had been sensible of the wrong man by his apostacy had done his and their Maker, by whose patent he held his lordship over them,) they presently forget their subjection to him, yea, take up arms in their supreme Lord's quarrel against apostate man. And thus they continue in array against him, till God and man meet together again in a happy covenant of peace; and then the commission which God in wrath gave them against rebel man is called in; and in the same day that God and the believing soul are made friends the war ends between him and them, Hosea ii. 18: 'In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven;' and mark the day from whence this covenant bears date. 'In that day,' that is, in the day that 'I betroth thee unto me;' so that our peace with the creatures comes in by our peace with God. And this being the blessing of the gospel, so must that also. But as our peace with God is not so perfectly enjoyed in this life, but God hath left himself at liberty to chastise his reconciled ones, and that sharply too; so our peace with the creatures doth not hinder but that they may be (yea often are) the rod which God useth to correct them with. The water may drown one saint, and the fire consume another to ashes, and yet these creatures at peace with these saints, because they are not sent by God in wrath against them for any real hurt that God means them thereby. This, indeed, was the commission that he gave all the creatures against apostate man as part of his curse for his sin. He sent the creatures against him (as a prince doth his general against a company of traitors in arms against him) with authority to take vengeance on them for their horrid rebellion against their Maker. But now the commission is altered and runs in a more comfortable strain. Go fire, and be the chariot in which such a saint may be brought home from earth to me in heaven's glory. Go water, waft another. And so of all the rest. Not a creature comes on a worse message to a saint. It is true they are sharp corrections as to the present smart they bring; but they are ever mercies, and do a friendly office in the intention of God, and happy issue to the believer. 'All things work together for good to them that love God,' Rom. viii. 28. And the apostle speaks it as a common principle well known among the saints, 'We know that all things work,' &c. As if he had said, Where is the saint that doth not know this? And yet it were happy for us if we knew it better; some of us would then pass our days more comfortably than now we do. But I intend not a discourse of this; let brevity here make amends for prolixity in the former.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUTY OF A CHRISTIAN TO STAND SHOD WITH A HEART PREPARED FOR ALL SUFFERINGS, WITH ONE REASON OF THE POINT.

We come to the third inquiry or question from these words propounded.

SECTION I.—*Quest.* What is meant by 'this preparation of the gospel of peace,' with which the Christian's feet are to be shod? or thus, What grace

Digitized by Google

doth this preparation, with which we are to be shod, signify? And why called the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Ans. As for the grace held forth by this 'preparation of the gospel,' &c., I find great variety in the apprehensions of the learned, and, indeed, variety rather than contrariety. I shall, therefore, spare the mentioning of them (many of which you may find collected by the Reverend Doctor Gouge upon the place, with his thoughts upon them), and crave the boldness to lay down (with due respect to others) the apprehensions I have had thereon; which I conceive will rather confirm than thwart their sense. Now what this preparation is, will best appear by considering the part it is designed for; and that is the foot, the only member in the body to be shod; and the piece of armour it is compared to, and that is the soldier's shoe, which, if right, is to be of the strongest make, being not so much intended for finery as defence; and that so necessary, that for want of it alone, the soldier, in some cases, is disabled for service; as when he is called to march far on hard ways, and those may be, strewed with sharp stones; how long will ye go, if not shod, without wounding or foundering? or if the way be good, but the weather bad, and his feet not fenced from the wet and cold, they are not so far from the head, but the cold got in them may strike up to that; yea, bring a disease on the whole body which will keep him on his bed when he should be in the field; as many almost are surfeited as slain in armies. Now what the foot is to the body, that the will is to the soul. The foot carries the whole body, and the will the soul; yea, the whole man, body and soul also. *Voluntas est locomotiva facultas;* we go whither our will sends us. And what the shoe is to the foot, that preparation, or if you please a readiness and alacrity, is to the will. The man whose feet are well shod fears no road, but goes through thick and thin; foul or fair, stones or straws, all are alike to him that is well shod; while the bare-footed man, or slenderly shod, shrinks when he feels the wet, and shricks when he lights on a sharp stone. Thus, when the will and heart of a man are prompt, and ready to do any work, the man is as it were shod and armed against all trouble and difficulty which he is to go over in the doing of it. They say the Irish tread so light on the ground, that they will run over some bogs, wherein any other almost would stick or sink. A prepared, ready heart I am sure will do this in a spiritual sense; none can walk where he can run: he makes nothing of afflictions, yea, persecutions, but goes singing over them. David never so merry as in the cave, Psa. lvii.; and how came he so? 'My heart is prepared, my heart is prepared, (saith he,) I will sing and give praise.' If David's heart had not been shod with this preparation, he would not have liked the way so well he was in; you would have had him sing to another tune, and heard him quarrel with his destiny, or fall out with his profession, that had put him to so much trouble, and driven him from the pleasures of a prince's court, to hide himself underground in a cave from those that hunted for his precious life. He would have spent his breath rather in pitying and bemoaning himself, than in praising of God. An unprepared heart, that is not well satisfied with its work or condition, hangs back: and though it may be brought to submit to it with much ado, yet it is but as a foundered horse on a stony way, who goes in pain every step, and would oft be turning out of the path if bit and whip did not keep him in.

Quest. 2. But why is it called the 'preparation of the gospel of peace?'

Answ. Because the gospel of peace is the great instrument by which God works the will and heart of man into this readiness and preparation to do or suffer what he calls to. It is the business we are set about, when preaching the gospel, to make a 'willing people,' Psalm cx. 'To make ready a people prepared for the Lord,' Luke i. As a captain is sent to beat up his drum in a city, to call in a company that will voluntarily list themselves to follow the prince's wars, and be in a readiness to take the field, and march at an hour's warning; thus the gospel comes to call over the hearts of men to the foot of God, to stand ready for his service, whatever it costs them: now this it doth as it is a 'gospel of peace.' It brings the joyful tidings of peace concluded betwixt God and man by the blood of Jesus; and this is so welcome to the trembling conscience of poor sinners, who before melted away their sorrowful days in a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation from the Lord

Digitized by Google

to devour them as his adversaries, that no sooner the report of a peace concluded betwixt God and them sounds in their ears by the preaching of the gospel, and is certainly confirmed to be true in their own consciences by the Spirit, who is sent from heaven to seal it to them, and give them some sweet gust of it, by shedding abroad the sense of it in their souls; but instantly there appears a new life in them, that they who before were so fearful and shy of every petty trouble, as to start at the thought of it (knowing it could bring no good news to them), are now, shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, able to go out smilingly to meet the greatest sufferings that are, or can be on the way towards them, and say undauntingly to them, as once Christ did to those that came with swords and staves to attack him, 'Whom seek ye?' 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God,' saith the apostle, Rom. v. 1. And this, how mightily doth it work? even 'to make them glory in tribulations.' The words opened afford these two points.

Doct. 1. It is our duty to be always prepared, and ready to meet with any trial and endure any hardship which God may lay out for us in our Christian warfare. *Doct.* 2. The peace which the gospel brings and speaks to the heart will make the creature ready to wade through any trial or trouble that meets him in his Christian course.

SECTION II.—*Doct.* 1. We ought to maintain a holy readiness of spirit to endure any hardship which God may lay out for us in our Christian course. Saints are sure to want no trials and sufferings: these, as Christ saith of the poor, 'we shall have always with us.' The bloody sweat which Christ felt, signified, saith Augustine, the sufferings which in his whole mystical body he should endure. Christ's whole body was lifted upon the cross, and no member must now look to escape the cross; and when the cross comes, how must we behave ourselves towards it? It will not speak us Christians, that we are merely passive, and make no notorious resistance against the will of God; but we must be active in our patience, if I may so speak, by showing a holy readiness and alacrity of spirit to be at God's ordering, though it were to be led down into the very chambers of death itself. That epitaph would not become a Christian's gravestone, which I have heard was engraved upon one's tomb, and might too truly on most that die, 'Here lies one against his will.' Holy Paul was of a better mind, Acts xxi. 13: 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' But may be this was but a flourish of his colours, when he knew the enemy to be far enough off; he may yet live to change his thoughts, when he comes to look death in the face. No, what he hath said he stands to, 2 Tim. iv.: 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand:' he speaks of it as if it were already done; indeed he had already laid his head on the block, and was dead before the stroke was given; not with fear, as some have been, but with a free resignation of himself to it; and if a malefactor be *civiliter mortuus*, dead in a law-sense, as soon as the sentence is out of the judge's mouth, though he lives some weeks after, then I am sure in a gospel-sense we may say, those are dead already, that are ready to die, that have freely put themselves under the sentence of it in their own willingness. And this alacrity and serenity that was on Paul's spirit was the more remarkable, if we consider how close he stood to his end. Indeed some, from the Greek word, which properly signifies a libation or drink-offering, conceive that Paul knew the very kind of death which he should suffer, namely, beheading; and that he alludes to the pouring out of blood or wine, used in sacrifice, as that kind of sacrifice which did best illustrate the nature of his death, viz., the pouring out his blood; which he did as willingly offer up in the service of Christ and his church, as they did pour out their wine in a drink-offering to the Lord. We shall now give some rational account of the point, why we are to be ready and prompt at suffering-work. The reasons of the point shall fall under two heads. First, taken from Christ, for or from whom we suffer. The second, from the excellency of such a temper, as this readiness to endure any hardship imports.

First, In regard of Christ. 1. He commands it. 2. He deserves it.

SECTION III.—First, He commands it. Indeed this frame of spirit is implied in every duty, as the *modus agendi*, that qualification which (like the stamp on coin) makes it current on God's account, Tit. iii. 1: 'Put them in

Digitized by Google

mind,' saith the apostle, 'to be ready to every good work;' be it active or passive, they must be ready for it, or else all they do is to no purpose. The word there is the same with this in the text, and is taken from a vessel that is fashioned and fitted for the use the master puts it to; we do not like, when we are to use a vessel, cup or pot, to have them out of the way, or to mend, and scour at that time we call for them, but look to find them at hand on the shelf, clean and fit for present use, or our servants shall hear of it. Thus God expects we should keep our hearts clean from the defilements of sin, and our affections whole and entire for himself; that they be not lent out to the creature, nor broken and bartered by any inordinacy of delight in them, lest we should be to seek when he calls us to do or suffer; or be found very unprepared, without much ado to set us right, and make us willing for the work; as the same apostle, 2 Tim. ii. 21: 'If a man therefore purge himself from these he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.' Now, as God commands this readiness in all, so especially in suffering-work, Luke ix. 23: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.' These words may be called the Christian's indenture: every one that will be Christ's servant must seal to this before he hath leave from Christ to call him Master; wherein you see the chief provision Christ makes is about suffering-work, as that which will most try the man. If the servant can but fadge with that, no fear but he will like the other part of his work well enough. Now I pray observe how careful Christ is to engage the heart in this work; he will have his servants not only endure the hardships of his service, but shew their readiness in it also: four remarkable passages are put in for this purpose. First, 'He must deny himself,' that is, deliver up his own will out of his own hands, and from that day that he enters into Christ's service acknowledge himself not to be *sui juris*, at his own disposal: whatever Christ bears, he cannot bear to hear his servants, when sent by him on any business, say, 'I will not.' Secondly, He tells them the worst at first, and chooseth to speak of the cross they must bear, rather than the crown they shall at last wear; and withal, that he expects they should not only bear it (this the wicked do, full sore against their wills), but also 'take it up.' Indeed he doth not bid them make the cross, run themselves into trouble of their own head, but he will have them take that up which he makes for them; that is, not step out of the way by any sinful shift to escape any trouble, but to accept of the burden God lays for them, and go cheerfully under it, yea, thankfully, as if God did us a favour to employ us in any suffering for him. We do not take so much pains as to stoop to take up that which is not worth something: Christ will have his people take up the cross, as one takes up a pearl that lies on the ground before him. Thirdly, This they must do every day, 'and take up his cross daily.' When there is none on his back, he must carry one in his heart; that is continually be preparing himself to stand ready for the first call, as porters stand at the merchants' doors in London, waiting till their masters have any burden for them to carry. Thus Paul professeth he died daily: how, but by a readiness of mind to die? He set himself in a posture to bid God's messenger welcome, whenever it came. This indeed is to take up the cross daily, when our present enjoyments do not make us strange to, or fall out with the thoughts of future trials. The Jews were to eat their passover with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand, and all in haste, Exod. xii. 11. When God is feasting the Christian with present comforts, he must have this gospel-shoe on; he must not set to it as if he were feasting at home, but as at a running meal on his way in an inn, willing to be gone, as soon as he is refreshed a little for his journey. Fourthly, When the cross is on, what then? then he must follow Christ: not stand still and fret, but follow; not be drawn and haled after Christ, but follow, as a soldier his captain, voluntarily. Christ doth not, as some generals, drive the country before him, and make his servants fight whether they will or no, but he invites them in, Hos. ii. 14: 'I will allure her into the wilderness.' Indeed a gracious heart follows Christ into the wilderness of affliction as willingly as a lover his beloved into some solitary private arbour or bower, there to sit and enjoy her presence. Christ useth arguments in his word and by his Spirit so satisfactory to the Christian, that he is very willing

Digitized by Google

to follow him; as the patient, who at first, may be, shrinks and draws back, when the physician talks of cutting or bleeding, but when he hath heard the reasons given by him why that course must be taken, and is convinced it is the best way for his health, then he very freely puts forth his arm to the knife, and thanks the physician for his pains.

SECTION IV.—Secondly, Christ deserves this frame of spirit at our hands. Of many, take but two particulars, wherein this will appear. First, If we consider his readiness to endure trouble and sorrow for us. Secondly, His tender care over us, while we endure either for or from him. First, His readiness to endure sorrow and trouble for us. When God called him to the work of Mediatorship, he found the way laid with sharper stones, I hope, than we do in the road that is appointed us to walk in. He was to tread upon swords and pikes, all manner of sorrows, and those edged with the wrath of God. This was the sharpest stone of all, which he hath taken out of the way; and yet how light did he go upon the ground! O had not his feet been well shod with love to our souls he would soon have turned back, and said the way was unpassable; but on he goes, and blunts not: never did we sin more willingly than he went to suffer for our sin. 'Lo! I come,' saith he to his Father, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart,' Psa. xl. 7. O what a full consent did the heart of Christ rebound to his Father's call, like some echo that answers what is spoken twice or thrice over. Thus, when his Father speaks to him to undertake the work of saving poor lost man, he doth not give a bare assent to the call, but trebles it; 'I come, I delight to do thy will, yea, thy law is in my heart.' He was so ready, that before his enemies laid hands on him, he, as it were, laid hands on himself, in the instituting of the Lord's supper, and there did sacramentally rend the flesh of his own body, and broach his own heart, to fill that cup with his precious blood, which with his own hand he gave them, that they might not look upon his death now at hand as a mere butchery from the hand of man's violence, but rather as a sacrifice, wherein he did freely offer up himself to God for them and all believers. And when the time was come that the sad tragedy should be acted, he, knowing the very place where the traitor with his black guard would come, goes out, and marches into the very mouth of them. O what a shame were it that we should be unwilling to go a mile or two of rugged way to bear so sweet a Saviour company in his sufferings! 'Could ye not watch with me one hour?' saith Christ to Peter, Matt. xxvi. 40. Not with me, who am now going to meet with death itself, and ready to bid the bitterest pangs of it welcome for your sakes? Not with me? Secondly, Christ deserves this readiness to meet any suffering he lays out in his providence for us, if we consider his tender care over his saints, when he calls them into a suffering condition. Kind masters may well expect cheerful servants. The more tender the captain is over his soldiers, the more prodigal they are of their own lives at his command. And it were strange if Christ's care, which deserves most, should meet with less ingenuity in a saint. Now Christ's care appears, First, in proportioning the burden to the back he lays it on. That which overloads one ship, and would hazard to sink her, is but just balance for another of greater burden. Those sufferings which one Christian cannot bear, another sails trim and even under. The weaker shoulder is sure to have the lighter carriage. As Paul burdened some churches (which he knew more able) to spare others, so Christ, to ease the weaker Christian, lays more weight on the stronger. 'Paul laboured more abundantly than they all,' he tells us, 1 Cor. xv. 10. But why did Christ so unequally divide the work? Observe the place, and you shall find that it was but necessary to employ that abundant grace he had given him. 'His grace,' saith, 'which was bestowed on me was not in vain; but I laboured more,' &c. There was so much grace poured into him, that some of it would have been in vain, if God had not found him more to do and suffer than the rest. Christ hath a perfect rate by him of every saint's spiritual estate, and according to this all are assessed, and so none are oppressed. The rich in grace can as easily pay his pound as the poor his penny. Paul laid down his head on the block for the cause of Christ, as freely as some (and those true but weak Christians) would have done a few pounds out of their purse. He endured death with less trouble than some could have done reproach for Christ. All have not a martyr's faith, nor all the martyr's

Digitized by Google

fire. This forlorn consists of a few files picked out of the whole army of saints. Secondly, The consolations he gives them then (in exceedings) above other of their brethren, that are not called out to such hard service. That part of an army which is upon action in the field is sure to have their pay, if their masters have any money in their purse, or care of them; yea, sometimes when their fellows left in their quarters are made to stay. I am sure there is more gold and silver (spiritual joy, I mean, and comfort) to be found in Christ's camp, among his suffering ones, than their brethren at home in peace and prosperity ordinarily can shew. What are the promises but vessels of cordial wine, tunned on purpose against a groaning hour, when God usually broacheth them? 'Call upon me,' saith God, 'in the day of trouble,' Psa. l. 15. And may we not do so in the day of peace? Yes; but he would have us most bold with him in a day of trouble. None find such quick despatch at the throne of grace as suffering saints. 'In the day that I cried,' saith David, 'thou answeredst me, and gavest me strength in my soul,' Psa. cxxxviii. 3. He was now in a strait, and God comes in haste to him. Though we may make a well friend stay, that sends for us, yet we will give a sick friend leave to call us up at midnight. In such extremities we usually go with the messenger that comes for us; and so doth God with the prayer. Peter knocked at their gate, who were assembled to seek God for him, almost as soon as their prayer knocked at heaven gate in his behalf. And truly it is no more than needs, if we consider the temptations of an afflicted condition; we are prone than to be suspicious our best friends forget us, and to think every stay a delay, and neglect of us; therefore God chooseth to shew himself most kind at such a time; 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth also by Christ,' 2 Cor. i. 5. As man laid on trouble, so Christ laid in consolation: both tides rose and fell together; when it was spring-tide with him in affliction, it was so with him in his joy. We relieve the poor as their charge increaseth: so Christ comforts his people as their troubles multiply. And now, Christian tell me, doth not thy dear Lord deserve a ready spirit in thee to meet any sufferiug with, for, or from him, who gives his sweetest comforts where his people use to expect their saddest sorrows? Well may the servant do his work cheerfully when his master is so careful of him as with his own hands to bring him his breakfast into the fields. The Christian stays not till he comes to heaven for all his comfort. There indeed shall be the full supper, but there is a breakfast Christian, of previous joys, more or less, which Christ brings to thee into the field, and shall be eaten on the place where thou endurest thy hardship. Thirdly, In the seasonable succours which Christ sends to bring them off safe. He doth not only comfort them in, but helps them out of, all their troubles. There is ever a door more than the Christian sees in his prison, by which Christ can with a turn of his hand open a way for his saint's escape. And what can he desire more? All is well that ends well. And what better security can we desire for this than the promise of the great God, with whom to lie is impossible? And I hope the credit which God hath in his people's hearts is not so low but a bill under his hand will be accepted at sight by them in exchange of what is dearest to them, life itself not excepted. Look to thyself when thou hast to do with others. None so firm but may crack under thee, if thou layest too much weight on them. One would have thought so worthy a captain as Uriah was, might have trusted his general, yea, his prince, and he so holy a man as David was; but he was unworthily betrayed by them both into the hands of death. Man may, the devil to be sure will, leave all in the lurch that do his work. But if God sets thee on, he will bring thee off; never fear a 'look thee to that' from his lips, when thy faithfulness to him hath brought thee into the briers. He that would work a wonder rather than let a runaway prophet perish in his sinful voyage, because a good man in the main, will heap miracle upon miracle rather than thou shalt miscarry and sink in thy duty; only be not troubled if thou art cast overboard, like Jonah, before thou seest the provision which God makes for thy safety: it is ever at hand, but sometimes lies close, and out of the creature's sight, like Jonah's whale, sent of God to ferry him to shore under water, and the prophet in his belly, before he knew where he was. That which thou thinkest come to devour thee, may be the messenger that God sends to bring thee safe to land. Is not thy shoe

Digitized by Google

Christian, yet on? art thou not yet ready to march; canst fear any stone now can hurt thy foot through so thick a sole?

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECOND REASON OF THE POINT TAKEN FROM THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS FRAME OF SPIRIT.

Reason 2. THE second reason of the point is taken from the excellency of this frame of spirit; which will appear in divers particulars.

SECTION I.—First, This readiness of heart to stoop to the cross evidenceth a gracious heart; and a gracious spirit, I am sure, is an excellent spirit; flesh and blood never made any willing to suffer either for God or from God; he that can do this hath that other spirit with Caleb, Num. xiv. 24, which proves him of a higher descent than this world. A carnal heart can neither act nor suffer freely, *voluntas libera, in quantum liberata.*—Luth. The will is no more free than it is made free by grace. So much flesh as is left in a saint, so much awkwardness and unwillingness to come to God's foot; and therefore where there is nothing but flesh, there can be nothing but unwillingness. He that can find his heart following God in his command or providence cheerfully 'may know who hath been there,' as one said of the famous Grecian limner: this is a line that none but God could draw on thy own soul. The midwives said of the Israelitish women, they were not like the Egyptians in bringing forth their children, 'for they were lively, and delivered ere the midwives could come at them,' Exod. i. 19. Truly, thus lively and ready is the gracious heart in any thing it is called to do or suffer. It is not delivered with so much difficulty of a duty as a carnal heart, which must have the help and midwifery of some carnal arguments, or else it sticks in the birth; but the gracious heart has done before these come to lend their helping hand; pure love to God, obedience to the call of his command, and faith on the security of his promise, facilitate the work, that be it never so burdensome to the flesh, yet it is not grievous to the spirit; that is ever ready to say, 'Thy will be done, and not mine.' The apostle makes this free submission to the disposure of God's afflicting hand to evidence a son's spirit: Heb. xii. 7, If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.' Observe, he doth not say, 'if you be chastened,' but 'if you endure chastening.' Naked suffering doth not prove sonship; but to endure it, so as not to sink in our courage, or shrink from under the burden God lays on, but readily to offer our shoulder to it, and patiently carry it, looking with a cheerful eye at the reward when we come, not to throw it off, but to have it taken off by that hand which laid it on, doth, (all which the word imports;) this shews a child-like spirit, and the evidence thereof must needs be a comfortable companion to the soul, especially at such a time, when that sophister of hell useth the afflictions which lie upon us as an argument to disprove our relation to God. Now to have this answer to stop the liar's mouth at hand; Satan, if I be not a child, how could I so readily submit to the Lord's family discipline? This is no small mercy.

SECTION II.—Secondly, This frame of spirit makes him a free man that hath it. And no mean price useth to be set on the head of liberty: the very birds had rather be abroad in the woods with liberty, though lean with cold and care, to pick up here and there a little livelihood, than in a golden cage with all their attendance. Now truly there is a bondage which few are sensible of, and that is, a bondage to the creature; when a man is so enslaved to his enjoyments and low contentments here on earth, that they give law to him, that would give law to them, and measure out of his joy to him, what he shall have, little or much, as he abounds with or is cut short of them. Thus some are slaves to their estates: it is said, 'Their hearts go after their covetousness;' that is, as the servant after the master, who dares not be from his back; their money is the master, and hath the best keeping; their heart waits on it, shall I say as a servant after his master? yea, as a dog at his master's foot. Others are as great slaves to their honours; so poor spirited that they cannot enjoy themselves, if they have not the cap and knee of all they meet. Such a slave was Haman, the great favourite of his prince. Who but he at court? that could at the expense of a few words get the king's ring to seal a bloody decree

Digitized by Google

for the massacre of so many thousands of innocent persons, against all sense and reason of state, merely to fulfil his lust. Had not this man honour enough put upon him to content his ambitious spirit? No; there is a poor Jew at the king's gate will not make a bow to him as he goes by, and this so ruffles his proud temper that he has no joy of all his other greatness. Esther v. 13: 'Yet all this availeth me nothing,' saith the poor-spirited wretch, 'so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.' A third sort are as much in bondage to their pleasures: they are said to 'live in pleasure on earth,' James v. 5. Their life is bound up in their pleasures, as the rush grows in the mud, and the fish lives in the water; they cannot live without their pleasures; take them from their feasts and sports, and their hearts, with Nabal's, die like a stone in their bosoms. Now this frame of spirit we are speaking of breaks all these chains, and brings the Christian out of every house of bondage. It teaches him to like what fare God sends. If prosperity comes, he knows how to abound, so that if he be by a turn of Providence thrown out of the saddle of his present enjoyment, his foot shall not hang in the stirrup, or his enslaved soul drag him after it with whining desires. No; through grace, he is a free man, and can spare the company of any creature, so long as he may but have Christ's with him. Blessed Paul stands upon his liberty. 'All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of any,' 1 Cor. vi. 12. I know the place is meant of those indifferent things concerning which there was a present dispute; but there is another sense in which all things here below were indifferent things to that holy man; honour or dishonour, abundance or want, life or death. These were indifferent to Paul; he would not come under the power of any one of them all. It did not become a servant of Christ, he thought, to be so tender of his reputation, as to write himself undone, when he had not this or that; not to be so in love with abundance, as not to be ready to welcome want; not to be endeared so to life, as to run from the thoughts of death; nor to be so weary of a suffering life, as to hasten death to come for his ease. *Major animus dicendas est, qui ærum nosam vitum magis elegit ferre, quam fugere.*—Aug.

Section III.—Thirdly, This readiness to suffer, as it ennobles with freedom, so it enables the Christian for service. It is a sure truth, so far and no more is the Christian fit to live serviceably, than he is prepared to suffer readily; because there is no duty but hath the cross attending on it, and he that is offended at the cross, will not be long pleased with the service that it brings. Prayer is the daily exercise of a saint; this he cannot do as he should, except he can heartily say, 'Thy will be done;' and who can do that in truth, unless ready to suffer? Praising God is a standing duty; yea, 'in every thing we must give thanks,' 1 Thess. v.; but, what if affliction befall us, how shall we tune our hearts to that note, if not ready to suffer? Can we bless God and murmur? praise God and repine? The minister's work is, to preach; woe to him if he do not; and if he do preach, he is sure to suffer. Paul had his orders for the one, and mittimus for the other together; he was sent at the same time to preach the grace of God to the world, and to endure the wrath of the world for God; so God told Ananias, that he should bear his name before the Gentiles, and suffer great things for his name's sake, Acts ix. 15, 19. And if the gospel did not please the ungrateful world out of Paul's mouth, who had such a rare art of sweetening it, it were strange that any one who fall so far short of his gifts, to move in the pulpit, and of his grace to win upon the hearts of men when out, should (if they mean to be faithful) think to go without the wages which the world paid him for his pains,—reproach, and contempt, if not downright blows of bloody persecution, as he met with. And is not this shoe needful for the preacher's foot, that is to walk among so many hissing serpents? Who but a Paul, that had got over the fond love of life, and fear of a bloody death, would have been so willing to go into the very lion's den, and preach the gospel there, where he invited death in a manner to come unto him? I mean at Rome itself, the seat of cruel Nero. 'So much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also, for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,' Rom. i. 15, 16. In a word, it is the duty of every Christian to make a free profession of Christ. Now this cannot be done without hazard many times. And if the heart be not resolved in this

Digitized by Google

point what to do, the first storm that riseth will make the poor man put into any creek or hole, rather than venture abroad in foul weather, John xii. 42: 'Among the chief rulers also many believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.' Poor souls, they could have been content, if the coast had been clear, to have put forth, but had not courage enough to bear a little scorn that threatened them. O what folly is it to engage for God, except we be willing to lay all at stake for him? It is not worth the while to set out in Christ's company by profession, except we mean to go through with him, and not leave him unkindly when we are half way, because of a slough or two.

SECTION IV.—This readiness of spirit to suffer gives the Christian the true enjoyment of his life. A man never comes to enjoy himself truly in any comfort of his life, till prepared to deny himself readily in it. It is a riddle, but two considerations will unfold it. First, Then, and not till then, is that which hinders the enjoyment of our lives taken away, and that is, fear: where this is, there is torment. The out-setting deer is observed to be lean, though where good food is, because always in fear. And so must they needs be, in the midst of all their enjoyments, on whose heart this vulture is continually feeding. There needs nothing else to bring a man's joy into a consumption, than an inordinate fear of losing what he hath at present: let but this get hold of a man's spirit, and once become hectical, and the comfort of his life is gone past recovery. How many by this are more cruel to themselves, than it is possible their worst enemies in the world could be to them! They, alas! when they have done their utmost, can kill them but once: but, by antedating their own miseries, they kill themselves a thousand times over, even as oft as the fear of dying comes over their miserable hearts. But when once the Christian has got his piece of armour on, his soul is prepared for death and danger; he sits at the feast which God in his present providence allows him, and fears no messenger with ill news to knock at the door; yea, he can talk of his dying hour, and not spoil the mirth of his present condition, as carnal men think it does, to whom a discourse of dying in the midst of their merry-makings, is like the coming in of the officer to attack a company of thieves that are making merry together, with their stolen goods about them; or like the wet cloth that Hazael clapped on the king his master's face: it makes all the joy which flushed out before, squat in on a sudden, that the poor creatures sit dispirited and all amort (as we say) till they get out of this affrighting subject by some divertisement or other, which only relieves them for the present, and puts them out of that particular fit this brought upon them, but leaves them deeper in slavery to such amazement of heart, whenever the same ghost shall appear for the future. Whereas the Christian, that hath this preparation of heart, never tastes more sweetness in the enjoyments of this life, than when he dips these morsels in the meditation of death and eternity. It is no more grief to his heart to think of the remove of these, which makes way for those far sweeter enjoyments, than it would be to one at a feast, to have the first course taken off, when he hath fed well on it, that the second course of all rare sweetmeats and banqueting stuff may come on, which it cannot till the other be gone. Holy David, Ps. xxiii. 4, 5, brings in, as it were, a death's head with his feast. In the same breath almost he speaks of his dying, ver. 4, and of the rich feast he at present sat at through the bounty of God, ver. 5, to which he was not so tied by the teeth, but if God, that gave him this cheer, should call him from it, to look death in the face, he could do it, and fear no evil when in the valley of the shadow thereof, Psalm xxiii. 4. And what think you of the blessed apostle Peter? Had not he, think you, the true enjoyment of his life, when he could sleep so sweetly in a prison, (no desirable place), fast bound between two soldiers (no comfortable posture), and this the very night before Herod would have brought him forth, in all probability, to his execution? no likely time, one would think, to get any rest, yet we find him, even there, thus, and then, so sound asleep, that the angel, who was sent to give him his gaol deliverance, smote him on the side to awake him, Acts xii. 6, 7. I question whether Herod himself slept so well that night, as this his prisoner did. And what was the potion that brought this holy man so quietly to rest? No doubt this preparation of the gospel of peace; he was ready to die, and that made him able to sleep. Why should that break his rest

Digitized by Google

in this world, which, if it had been effected, would have brought him to his eternal rest in the other? Secondly, The more ready and prepared the Christian is to suffer from God, or for God, the more God is engaged to take care for him and of him. A good general is most tender of that soldier's life, who is least tender of it himself. The less the Christian values himself and his interests for God's sake, the more careful God is of him, either to keep him from suffering, or in it; both which are meant, Matt. xvi. 25: 'Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Abraham was ready to offer up his son, and then God would not suffer him to do it. But if the Lord at any time takes the Christian's offer, and lets the blow be given, though to the severing of soul and body, he yet shews his tender care of him by the high esteem he sets upon their blood; which is not more prodigally spilt by man's cruelty, than carefully gathered up by God: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.'

Thus we see, that by resigning ourselves up readily to the disposure of God, we engage God to take care of us, and whatever befalls us. And that man or woman sure, if any other in the world, must needs live comfortably that hath the care of himself wholly taken off his own shoulders, and rolled upon God, at whose finding he now lives. The poor widow never was better off, than when the prophet kept house for her; she freely parted with her little meal for the prophet's use; and as a reward of her faith in crediting the message he brought from the Lord, so far as to give the bread out of her own mouth and child's to the prophet, she is provided for by a miracle, 1 Kings xvii: 12, 13. O when a soul is once thus brought to the foot of God, that it can scarcely say, Lord, here I am, willing to deliver up all I have and am, to be at thy disposal: my will shall be done when thou hast thy will of me! God accounts himself deeply obliged to look after that soul.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NUMBER OF TRUE CHRISTIANS BUT LITTLE, SHEWN FROM THIS READINESS TO SUFFER, THAT IS REQUIRED IN EVERY CHRISTIAN, MORE OR LESS; WITH AN EXHORTATION TO THE DUTY, FROM TWO ARGUMENTS.

Use 1. First, Must the Christian stand thus shod in readiness to march at the call of God in any way or weather? This will exceedingly thin and lessen the number of true Christians, to what they appear to be at the first view by the estimate of an easy, cheap profession. He that should come into our assemblies, and see them thracked and wedged in so close with multitudes flocking after the word, might wonder at first to hear the ministers sink the number of Christians so low, and speak of them as so little a company. Surely their eyes fail them, that they cannot see wood for trees; Christians that stand before them. This very thing made one of the disciples ask Christ, with no little wondering at it, 'Lord, are there few that shall be saved?' Luke xiii. 23. Observe the occasion of this question: 'Christ,' verse 22, 'went through the cities and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.' He saw Christ so free of his pains, to preach at every town he came, and people throng after him with great expressions of joy that fell from many, ver. 17: 'Then said he, Lord there are few that shall be saved?' As if he had said, This seems very strange, and almost incredible. To see the way to heaven strewed so thick with people, and the means of salvation in such request, and yet but few saved at last; how can this be? Now mark our Saviour's unriddling this mystery: 'And he said to them,' (it seems the man spoke more than his own scruple), 'Strive to enter in at the straight gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek, but shall not be able,' ver. 24; as if Christ had said, You judge by a wrong rule. If profession would serve the turn, and flocking after sermons with some seeming joy at the word were enough to save, heaven would soon be full: but as you love your souls, do not bolt or try yourselves by this coarse sieve; 'but strive to enter, fight and wrestle, venture life and limb, rather than fall short of heaven. 'For many shall seek, but shall not be able,' that is seek by an easy profession, and cheap religion, such as is hearing the word, performance of duties, and the like; of this kind there are many that will come and walk about heaven's door, willing enough to enter, if they may do it without ruffling their

Digitized by Google

pride in a crowd, or hazarding their present carnal interest by any contest and scuffle. 'But they shall not be able, that is, 'to enter;' because their carnal cowardly hearts shall not be able to strive; so that take Christians under the notion of 'seekers,' and, by Christ's own words, there are many; but consider them under the notion of 'strivers,' such as stand ready shod with a holy resolution, to strive even to blood, if such trials meet them in the way to heaven, rather than not enter, and then the number of Christian soldiers will shrink, like Gideon's goodly host, to a little troop. O how easy were it to instance in several sorts of Christians, so called in a large sense, that have not this gospel-shoe to their foot, and therefore sure to founder and falter, when once they be brought to go upon sharp stones!

SECTION I.—First, The ignorant Christian, what work is he like to make of suffering for Christ and his gospel? And they are not the least number in many congregations; they who have not so much light of knowledge in their understanding as to know who Christ is, and what he has done for them, will they have so much heat of love as to march cheerfully after him, when every step they take must fetch blood from them? Nabal thought he gave a rational answer to David's servants, that asked some relief of him in their present strait, when he said, 'Shall I take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men I know not whence they be?' 1 Sam. xxv. He thought it too much to part with, upon so little acquaintance. And will the ignorant person, think you, be ready to part, not only with his bread, and flesh out of the pot, a little of his estate I mean, but the flesh of his own body, if called to suffer, and all this at the command of Christ, who is one he knows not whence he is? Paul gives this as the reason why he suffered, and was not ashamed; for, saith he, 'I know whom I have believed,' 2 Tim. i. 12. Stories tell us of the Samaritans, a mongrel kind of people, both in their descent and religion, that when it went well with the people of God, the Israelites, then they would claim kindred with them, and be Jews; but when the church of God was under any outward affliction, then they would disclaim it again. And we may the less wonder at this base, cowardly spirit in them, if we read the character Christ gives of them, to be a people 'that worshipped they knew not what,' John iv. 22. Religion hath but loose hold of them that have no better hold of it than a blind man's hand.

Secondly, Carnal gospellers, who keep possession of their lusts, while they make profession of Christ. A generation these are, that have nothing to prove themselves Christians by, but their baptism, and a Christian name which they have obtained thereby; such as, were they to live among Turks and heathens, their language and conversations, did they but conceal whence they came, would never betray them to be Christians; can it now be rationally thought that these are the men and woman who stand ready to suffer for Christ and his gospel? No, sure, they who will not wear Christ's yoke, will much less bear his burden. If the yoke of the command be thought grievous that binds them to duty, they will much more think the burden of the cross insupportable. He that will not do for Chrtst, will not die for Christ. That servant is very unlike to fight to blood in his master's quarrel, that will not work for him so as to sweat in his service.

Thirdly, The politic professor, a fundamental article in whose creed is to save himself not from sin, but from danger; and therefore he studies the times more than the Scriptures, and is often looking what corner the wind lies in, that accordingly he may shape his course and order his profession, which like the hedgehog's house, ever opens towards the warm side.

Fourthly, The covetous professor, whose heart and head are so full of worldly projects, that suffering for Christ must needs be very unwelcome to him, and find him far enough from such a disposition. You know what the Egyptians said of the Israelites, 'They are entangled in the land; the wilderness hath shut them in,' Exod. xiv. 13. More true it is of this sort of professors, they are entangled in the world; this wilderness hath shut them in. A man whose foot is in a snare, is as fit to walk and run, as they to follow Christ, when to do it may prejudice their worldly interest. Our Saviour, speaking of the miseries that were to come on Jerusalem, 'Woe,' saith he, 'unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days,' Matt. xxiv. 19; because it

Digitized by Google

would be more difficult for them to escape the danger by flight; the big-bellied mother being unable to fly fast enough with her child in her womb, and the nurse as unwilling to leave her dear babe behind her. But many more woes to them who, in days of trial and persecution for the gospel, shall be found big with the world, or that give suck to any covetous, inordinate affection to the creatures; such will find it hard to escape the temptation that these will beset them with. It is impossible in such a time to keep estate and Christ together; and as impossible for a heart that is set upon the world to be willing to leave it for Christ's company.

Fifthly, The conceited professor, who hath a high opinion of himself, and is so far from a humble, holy jealousy and fear of himself, that he is self-confident. Here is a man shod and prepared, he thinks, but not with the right gospel-shoe. By 'strength shall no man prevail,' 1 Sam. ii. 9. He that in Queen Mary's days was so free of his flesh for Christ, as he said he would see his fat melt in the fire, of which he had good store, rather than fall back to popery, lived, poor man, to see his resolution melt, and himself cowardly part with his faith to save his fat. Those that glory of their valour, when they put on the harness, ever put it off with shame. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, a very Jacob, that will supplant its own self. He that cannot take the length of his foot, how can he of himself fit a shoe to it?

SECTION II.—Be exhorted, all you that take the name of Christ upon you, to get this shoe of preparation on, and keep it on, that you may be ready at all times to follow the call of God's providence, though it should lead you into a suffering condition. Take but two motives.

First, Consider, Christian, suffering work may overtake thee suddenly, before thou art aware of it: therefore be ready shod. Sometimes orders come to soldiers for a sudden march; they have not so much as an hour's warning, but must be gone as soon as the drum beats. And so mayest thou be called out, Christian, before thou art aware, into the field, either to suffer for God, or from God. Abraham had little time given him to deal with his heart, and persuade it into a compliance with God, for offering his son Isaac; a great trial and short warning: 'Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac,' Gen. xxii. 2; not a year, a month, a week hence, but now! This was in the night, and Abraham is gone early in the morning, ver. 3. How would he have entertained this strange news, if he had been then to gain the consent of his heart? But that was not now to do; God had Abraham's heart already, and therefore he doth not now dispute his order, but obeys. God can make a sudden alteration in thy private affairs, Christian. How couldst thou, in thy perfect strength and health, endure to hear the message of death, if God should, before any lingering sickness hath brought thee into some acquaintance with death, say no more, but, Up and die, as once to Moses? Art thou shod for such a journey? couldst thou say, 'Good is the word of the Lord?' What if in one day thou wast to step out of honour into disgrace, to be stript of thy silks and velvets, and in vile raiment called to act a beggar's part? couldst thou rejoice that thou art made low, and find thy heart ready to bless the Most High? This would speak thee a soul evangelically shod indeed. Again, God can as soon change the scene in the public affairs of the times thou livest in, as to the gospel and profession of it May be now authority smiles on the church of God, but within awhile it may frown, and the storm of persecution arise; Acts ix. 31: 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea;' this was a blessed time; but how long did it last? alas! not long; chap. xii., there is sad news of a bloody persecution, ver. 1: 'About this time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church;' in which persecution, James, the brother of John, lost his life by his cruel sword; and Peter, in prison, like to go to the same shambles; and the church driven into a corner to pray in the night together, ver. 12. O what a sad change is here! now in blood, who even now had rest on every side. It is observed that in islands the weather is far more variable and uncertain than in the continent; there you may know ordinarily what weather will be for a long time together; but in islands, in the morning we know not what weather will be before night; we have ofttimes summer and winter in the same day, and all this is imputed to the near neighbourhood of the sea that surrounds them. The saints in heaven, they live, as I may so say, on the continent; a blessed constancy

Digitized by Google

of peace and rest is there enjoyed. They may know by what peace and bliss they have at present, what they shall have to eternity; but here, below, the church of Christ is as a floating island, compassed with the world (I mean, men of the world) as with a sea; and these sometimes blow hot, and sometimes cold; sometimes they are still and peaceable, and sometimes enraged and cruel; even as God binds up or lets loose their wrath. Now, Christian, doth it not behove thee to be always in a readiness, when thou knowest not but the next moment the wind may turn into the cold corner; and the times which now favour the gospel, so as to fill the sails of thy profession with all encouragement, may on a sudden blow full on thy face, and oppose it as much as it did before countenance it?

Secondly, Consider, if thy feet be not shod with a preparation to suffer for Christ here on earth, thy head cannot be crowned in heaven, Rom. viii. 17: 'If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' Now mark the following words: 'If so be we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.' It is true, all the saints do not die martyrs at a stake, but every saint must have a spirit of martyrdom, as I may so call it, a heart prepared for suffering. God never intended Isaac should be sacrificed; yet he will have Abraham lay the knife to his throat. Thus God will have us lay our neck on the block, and be (as Paul said of himself) bound in the spirit, under a sincere purpose of heart to give up ourselves to his will and pleasure; which is called, a 'presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God,' Rom. xii. 1. That as the Jew brought the beast alive, and presented it freely before him to be done withal as God had commanded; so we are to present our bodies before God to be disposed of as he commands, both in active and passive obedience. He that refuseth to suffer for Christ, refuseth also to reign with Christ. The putting off the shoe among the Jews was a sign of a man's putting off the right of an inheritance, Deut. xxv. 9, 10. Thus did Elimelech's kinsman; when he renounced and disclaimed any right that he might have in his estate, he drew off his shoe, Ruth iv. 7, 8. O Christian, take heed of putting off thy gospel-shoe; by this thou dost disclaim thy right in heaven's inheritance; no portion is there laid up for any that will not suffer for Christ. The persecutions which the saints endure for the gospel, are made by Paul an evident token to them of salvation, and that of God, Phil. i. 28. Surely then the denying Christ to escape suffering, is a sad token of perdition. O sirs, is not heaven's inheritance worth enduring a little trouble for it? Naboth's vineyard was no great matter, yet rather than he would (not lose it, but) sell it to its worth, or change it for a better in another place, he chose to lay his life at stake by provoking a mighty king. Thou canst, Christian, venture no more for thy heavenly inheritance, than he paid for refusing to alienate his petty patrimony of an acre or two of land (thy temporal life I mean). And besides the odds between his vineyard on earth, and thy paradise on heaven, which is infinite, and suffers no proportion, thou hast this advantage also of him in thy sufferings for Christ; when Naboth lost his life, he lost his inheritance also, that he so strove to keep; but thy persecuting enemies shall do thee this friendly office against their wills, that when they dispossess thee of thy life, they shall help thee into possession of thy inheritance.

CHAPTER XVII.

SIX DIRECTIONS FOR THE HELPING ON OF THIS SPIRITUAL SHOE.

Quest. The great question I now expect to fall from thy mouth, Christian, is, not how thou mayest escape these troubles and trials which, as the evil genius of the gospel, do always attend it; but rather, how thou mayest get this shoe on, thy heart ready for a march, to go and meet them when they come, and cheerfully wade through them, whatever they be, or how long soever they stay with thee?

Answ. This is a question well becoming a Christian soldier; to ask for armour wherewith he may fight: whereas the coward throws away his armour, and asks whither he may fly. I shall therefore give the best counsel I can in these few particulars.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—First, Look carefully to the ground of thy active obedience, that it be sound and sincere. The same right principles whereby the sincere soul acts for Christ, will carry him to suffer for Christ, when a call from God comes with such an errand. 'The children of Ephraim being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle,' Psa. lxxviii. 9. Why? what is the matter? so well armed, and yet so cowardly? This seems strange: read the preceding verse, and you will cease wondering; they are called there, 'a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.' Let the armour be what it will, yea, if soldiers were in a castle, whose foundations were rock, and walls brass; yet if their hearts be not right to their prince, an easy storm will drive them from the walls, and a little scare open their gate, which hath not this bolt of sincerity on it to hold it fast. In our late wars we have seen, that honest hearts within thin and weak works have held the town, when no walls could defend treachery from betraying trust. O labour for sincerity in the engaging at first for God and his gospel. Be oft asking thy own soul for whom thou prayest, hearest, reformest this practice and that. If thou canst get a satisfactory answer from thy soul here, thou mayest hope well: if faith's working hand be sincere, then its fighting hand will be valiant. That place is observable, Heb. xi. 33: 'Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire;' and with other great things that faith enabled them to endure, as you may read in the 34th, 35th, and 36th verses; where I pray note, how the power of faith enabling the Christian to work righteousness (that is, live holily and righteously) is reckoned among the wonders of sufferings, which it strengthened them to endure. Indeed, had it not done this, it would never have endured these.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Pray for a suffering spirit. This is not a common gift, which every carnal gospeller and slighty professor hath. No; it is a peculiar gift, and bestowed but on a few sincere souls; 'unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake, Phil. i. 20. All the parts and common gifts that a man hath will never enable him to drink deep of this cup for Christ; such is the pride of man's heart, he had rather suffer any way than this; rather from himself, and for himself, than from Christ, or for Christ. You would wonder to see sometimes how much a child will endure at his play, and never cry for it: this fall, and that knock, and no great matter is made of it by him, because got in a way that is pleasing to him; but let his father whip him, though it puts him not to half the smart, yet he roars and takes on, that there is no quieting of him. Thus men can bring trouble on themselves, and bite in their complaints. They can, one play away his estate at cards and dice, and another whore away his health, or cut off many years from his life by beastly drunkenness, and all is endured patiently; yea, if they had their money and strength again, they would go the same way: they do not repent of what their lusts have cost them, but mourn they have no more to bestow upon them; their lusts shall have all they have to a morsel of bread in their cupboard, and drop of blood in their veins; yea, they are not afraid of burning in hell, as their sins' martyrs. But come and ask these, that are so free of their purse, flesh, soul, and all, in lust's service, to lay their estate or life for a few moments at a stake in Christ's cause and his truth's, and you shall see that God is not so much beholden to them. And therefore pray and pray again for a suffering spirit in Christ's cause; yea, saints themselves need earnestly plead with God for this. Alas! they do not find suffering work follow their hand so easily. The flesh loves to be indulged, not crucified; many a groan it costs the Christian, before he can learn to love this work. Now prayer, if any means, will be helpful to thee in this particular. He that can wrestle with God, need not fear the face of death and danger. Prayer engageth God's strength and wisdom for our help; and what is too hard for the creature, that hath God at his back for his help to do or suffer? We are bid to 'count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations,' James i. 2. Not temptations to sin, but for righteousness; he means troubles for Christ and his gospel. Ah! but might the poor Christian say, it were cause of more joy to be able to stand under these temptations, than to fall into them. Little joy would it be to have the temptation, and not the grace to

Digitized by Google

endure temptation. True, indeed; but for thy comfort, Christian, He that leads thee into this temptation stands ready to help thee through it; therefore, ver. 5, there is a gracious *si quis* set up; 'if any of you (*i.e.*, you sufferers chiefly) lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.' This, methinks, should not much strain our faith to believe. There are not many masters so disingenuous to be found, that would twit and upbraid their servant for asking humbly their counsel in a work of peril and difficulty, which they cheerfully undertake out of love to their persons and obedience to their command; how much less needest thou fear such dealing from thy God? If thou hast so much faith and love, as to venture at his command upon the sea of suffering, he will without doubt find so much mercy, as to keep thee from drowning, if, feeling thyself begin to sink, thou criest earnestly as Peter did to him, 'Lord, save me;' wert thou even under water, prayer would buoy thee up again. But if thou art not a man of prayer before suffering work come, thou wilt be able to do little at that weapon then. The proverb indeed is, He that would learn to pray, let him go to sea; but I think it were better thus, He that would go to sea (this I mean of suffering), let him learn to pray before he comes there.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, Be much in the meditation of a suffering state. He will say his lesson best, when his master calls him forth, that is oftenest conning it over beforehand. Do by thy troubles thou mayest meet with as porters use to do with their burdens; they will lift them again and again, before they take them on to their back. Thus do thou; be often lifting up in thy meditations those evils that may befall thee for Christ and his truth, and try how thou couldst agree with them, if called to endure them; set poverty, prison, banishment, fire and fagot before thee on the one hand, and the precious truths of Christ on the other, with the sweet promises made to those that shall hold fast the word of patience held forth in such an hour of temptation. Suppose it were now thy very case, and thou wert put to thy choice, which hand thou wouldst take; study the question seriously, till thou determinest it clearly in thy conscience: and do this often, that the arguments which flesh and blood will then be sure to use for thy pitying thyself may not be new and unanswered, nor the encouragements and strong consolations which the word affords be strange, and under any suspicion in thy thoughts, when thou art to venture thy life upon their credit and truth. That of Augustine we shall find most true, *Non facile inveniunter præsidia in adversitate, quæ non fuerint in pace quæsita.* The promises are our garrison and fastness at such a time; and we shall not find it easy to run to them in a strait, except we were acquainted with them in a time of peace; a stranger that flies to a house for refuge in the dark night, he fumbles about the door, and knows not how to find the latch; his enemy, if nigh, may kill him before he can open the door; but one that lives in the house, or is well acquainted with it, is not long in getting in. 'Come, my people,' saith God, 'enter thou into thy chambers,' Isa. xxvi. He is shewing them their lodgings in his attributes and promises, before it is night, and their sufferings be come, that they may readily find the way to them in the dark.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, Make a daily resignation of thyself up to the will of God. Indeed, this should be, as it were, the lock of the night, and key of the morning; we should open and shut our eyes with this recommending of ourselves into the hands of God. This, if daily performed, not formally (as all duties frequently repeated, without the more care, are like to be), but solemnly, would sweetly dispose the soul for a welcoming of any trial that can befall it. The awkwardness of our hearts to suffer, comes much from distrust. An unbelieving soul treads upon the promise, as a man upon ice; at first going upon it, he is full of fears and tumultuous thoughts lest it should crack. Now, this daily resignation of thy heart, as it will give thee an occasion of conversing more with the thoughts of God's power, faithfulness, and other of his attributes, (for want of familiarity with which, jealousies arise in our hearts when put to any great plunge,) so also it will furnish thee with many experiences of the reality both of his attributes and promises; which, though they need not any testimony from sense, to gain them credit with us, yet so much are we made of sense, so childish and weak is our faith, that we find our hearts much helped by those experiences we have had, to rely on him for the future. Look, therefore, care-

Digitized by Google

fully to this; every morning leave thyself and ways in God's hand, as the phrase is, Psa. x. 14; and at night look again how well God hath looked to his trust, and sleep not till thou hast affected thy heart with his faithfulness, and laid a stronger charge on thy heart to trust itself again in God's keeping in the night. And when any breach is made, and seeming loss befalls thee in any enjoyment, which thou hast by faith insured of thy God, observe how God fills up that breach, and makes up that loss to thee; and rest not till thou hast fully vindicated the good name of God to thy own heart. Be sure thou lettest no discontent or dissatisfaction lie upon thy spirit at God's dealings; but chide thy heart for it, as David did his, Psa. xlii. And thus doing, with God's blessing, thou shalt keep thy faith in breath for a longer race, when called to run it.

Section V.—Fifthly, Make self-denial appear as rational and reasonable as thou canst to thy soul; the stronger the understanding is able to reason for the equity and rationality of any work or duty, the more readily and cheerfully (if the heart be honest and sincere) is it done. Suppose, Christian, thy God should call for thy estate, liberty, yea, life and all, can it seem unreasonable to thee? Especially, First, If thou considerest that he bids thee deliver his own, not thy own. He lent thee these; but he never gave away the propriety of them from himself. Dost thou wrong thy neighbour, to call for that money thou lentest him a year or two past? no sure; thou thinkest he hath reason to thank thee for lending it to him, but none to complain for calling it from him. Secondly, Consider, he doth not, indeed cannot bid thee deny so much for him, as he hath done for thee. Is reproach for Christ so intolerable, that thy proud spirit cannot brook it? Why, who art thou? What great house comest thou from? See one that had more honour to lay at stake than I hope thou darest pretend to, Jesus Christ, 'who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation.' Is it pain and torment thou art afraid of? O look up to the cross, where the Lord of life hung for thy sins, and thou wilt take up thy own cross more willingly, and thank God too that he hath made thine so light and easy, when he provided one so heavy and tormenting for his beloved Son. Thirdly, Consider whatever God calls thee to deny for his truth, it is not more than he can recompense. Moses saw this, and that made him leap out of his honours and riches into the reproach of Christ, 'for he had respect to the recompense of reward,' Heb. xi. 26. It is much that a man will deny himself in, for something his heart strongly desires in this life. If a man be greedy of gain, he will deny himself of half the night's sleep, to plot in his bed, or rise early from it to be at his work; he will eat homely fare, go in vile raiment, dwell in a smoky house (as we see in London), for the conveniency of a shop. How men of quality will crowd themselves up into a little corner, though to the prejudice of their healths, and hazard sometimes of their lives! yet hope of gain recompenseth all! And now put their gains into the scale with thine, Christian, that are sure to come in by denying thyself for Christ (which theirs are not), and ask thy soul, whether it blush not to see them so freely deny themselves of the comfort of their lives, for an imaginary, uncertain, at best a short advantage, while thou huddlest so with Christ for a few outward enjoyments, which shall be paid thee over an hundredfold here, and beyond what thou canst now conceive when thou comest to heaven's glory.

Section VI.—Sixthly, Labour to carry on the work of mortification every day to further degrees than other. It is the sap in the wood that makes it hard to burn, and corruption unmortified that makes the Christian loth to suffer; dried wood will not kindle sooner than a heart dried and mortified to the lusts of the world will endure anything for Christ. The apostle speaks of some that were 'tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection,' Heb. xi. 35. They did not like the world so well, as, being so far on their journey to heaven (though in hard way), to be willing to come back to live in it any longer. Take heed, Christian, of leaving any worldly lust unmortified in thy soul. This will never consent thou shouldst endure much for Christ. Few ships sink at sea; they are the rocks and shelves that split them. Couldst thou get off the rocks of pride and unbelief, and escape knocking on the sands of fear of man, love of the world, and the like lusts, thou wouldst do well enough in the greatest storm that can overtake thee in the sea of this

Digitized by Google

world. 'If a man purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for his master's use, and prepared unto every good work,' 2 Tim. ii. 21. O that we knew the heaven that is in a mortified soul! one that is crucified to the world, and lusts of it! He hath the advantage of any other in doing or suffering for Christ, and enjoying Christ in both. A mortified soul lives out of all noise and disturbance from those carnal passions which put all out of quiet where they come. When the mortified soul goes to duty, here are not those rude and unmannerly intrusions of impertinent, carnal, yea, sinful thoughts between him and his God. Is he to go to prison? Here is not such weeping and taking on. No lust to hang about him and break his heart with its insinuations; no self-love to entreat him that he would pity himself; his heart is free, got out of the acquaintance of these troublers of his peace; and a prison to him, if he may go upon so honourable an errand, as testifying to the truth is, O how welcome is it to him! whereas an unmortified heart is wedged in with so great acquaintance and kindred (as I may so say) which his heart hath in the world, that it is impossible to get out of their embraces into any willingness to suffer. A man that comes into an inn in a strange place, he may rise at what time he pleaseth, and be gone as early as he pleaseth in the morning; there are none entreat him to stay; but hard to get out of a friend's house; there, like the Levite's father-in-law, will be desiring him to stay one day, and then one more, and another after that. The mortified soul is the stranger; he meets with no disturbance (I mean comparatively) in his journey to heaven, while the unmortified one is linked in fast enough for getting on his journey in haste, especially so long as the flesh hath so fair an excuse as the foulness of the way or weather, any hardship likely to be endured for his profession. I have read of one of the Catos, that in his old age he withdrew himself from Rome to his country-house, that he might spend his elder years free from care and trouble. And all the Romans as they rode by his house used to say, *Iste solus scit vivere:* 'This man alone knows how to live.' I know not what art Cato had to disburden himself, by his retiring, of the world's cares; I am sure a man may go into the country, and yet not leave the city behind him; his mind may be in a crowd, while his body is in the solitude of a wilderness. Alas, poor man! he was a stranger to the gospel; had he been but acquainted with this, it could have shewn him a way out of the world's crowd, in the midst of Rome itself, and that is, by mortifying his heart to the world, both in the pleasures and troubles of it, and then that high commendation might have been given him without an hyperbole; for to speak truth, he only knows aright how to live in the world, that hath learnt to die to the world. And so much for the first point; which was, that the Christian is to stand ready for all trials and troubles that may befall him. The second follows.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHEWETH WHO IS THE PERSON THAT IS SHOD AND PREPARED FOR SUFFERINGS, *i. e.*, HE THAT HATH THE GOSPEL'S PEACE IN HIS BOSOM; AND HOW THIS PEACE DOTH PREPARE FOR SUFFERING; WITH A BRIEF APPLICATION OF ALL.

Doct. 2. THAT he who enjoys the peace of the gospel in his bosom is the person, and the only person, that stand shod for all ways, prepared for all troubles and trials.

SECTION I.—First, None can make a shoe to the creature's foot, so as he shall go easy on hard way, but Christ; he can do it to the creature's full content; and how doth he do it? Truly no other way than by underlaying it; or if you will, lining it with the peace of the gospel. What though the way be set with sharp stones? if this shoe go between the Christian's foot and them, they cannot much be felt. Solomon tells us, 'The ways of wisdom (that is, Christ) are ways of pleasantness.' But how so, when some of them are ways of suffering? the next words resolve us, 'And all her paths are peace,' Prov. iii. 17. Where there is peace, such peace as peace with God and conscience, there can want no pleasure. David goes merry to bed, when he hath nothing to supper but the gladness that God by this puts into his heart, and promiseth himself a better night's rest than any of them all, that are feasted with the world's cheer,

Digitized by Google

Psa. xlvii. 8: 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep.' This same peace with God, enjoyed in the conscience, redounds to the comfort of the body. Now David can sleep sweetly, when he lies on a hard bed; what here he saith he would do, Psa. iii. 5, he saith he had done, 'I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me.' The title of the psalm tells us when David had this sweet night's rest; not when he lay on his bed of down in his stately palace at Jerusalem, but when he fled for his life from his unnatural son Absalom, and possibly was forced to lie in the open field under the canopy of heaven. Truly it must be a soft pillow indeed that could make him forget his danger, who then had such a disloyal army at his back hunting of him; yea, so transcendent is the sweet influence of this peace, that it can make the creature lie down as cheerfully to sleep in the grave, as on the softest bed. You will say that child is willing that calls to be put to bed; some of the saints have desired God to lay them at rest in their beds of dust, and that not in a pet and discontent with their present trouble, as Job did, but from a sweet sense of this peace in their bosoms. 'Now let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,' was the swan-like song of old Simeon. He speaks like a merchant that had got all his goods on ship-board, and now desires the master of the ship to hoist sail, and be gone homewards. Indeed, what should a Christian, that is but a foreigner here, desire to stay any longer for in the world, but to get this full lading in for heaven? And when hath he that, if not when he is assured of his peace with God? This peace of the gospel, and sense of the love of God in the soul, doth so admirably conduce to the enabling of a person in all difficulties, and temptations, and troubles, that ordinarily, before he calls his saints to any hard service or hot work, he gives them a draught of this cordial wine next their hearts, to cheer them up and embolden them in the conflict. God calls Abram out of his native country, Gen. xii. 1: and what so fit as a promise of Christ to bring his heart to God's foot, ver. 2, 3. A sad errand it was that sent Jacob to Padan-Aram; he fled from an angry, wrathful brother, that had murdered him already in his thoughts, to an unkind, deceitful uncle, under whom he should endure much hardship. Now God comes in a sweet gospel-vision to comfort this poor pilgrim; for by 'that ladder, whose foot stood on earth, and top reached heaven,' Christ was signified to his faith, in whom heaven and earth meet, God and man are reconciled; and by the moving up and down of the angels on the ladder, the ministry of the angels, which Christ by his death and intercession procures for his saints, that they shall tend on them as servants on their master's children; so that the sum of all is as much as if God had said, Jacob, thy brother Esau hates thee, but in Christ I am reconciled to thee; thy uncle, Laban, he will wrong thee, and deal hardly by thee, but fear him not: as I am in Christ at peace with thee, so through him thou shalt have my especial care over thee, and the guardianship of the holy angels about thee, to defend thee wherever thou goest. The Israelites when ready to take their march out of Egypt into a desolate wilderness, where they should be put to many plunges, and their faith tried to purpose; to prepare them the more for these, he entertains them at a gospel-supper before they go forth, I mean the passover, which pointed to Christ; and no doubt the sweetness of this feast made some gracious souls among them (that tasted Christ in it) endure the hardship and hunger of the wilderness the more cheerfully. And the same care and love did our Lord Jesus observe in the institution of his supper, choosing that for the time of erecting this sweet ordinance, when his disciples' feet stood at the brink of a sea of sorrows and troubles, which his death, and the consequences of it, would inevitably bring upon them. Now the pardon of their sins sealed to their souls in that ordinance must needs be welcome, and enable them to wade through their sufferings the more comfortably. Indeed, the great care which Christ took for his disciples, when he left the world, was not to leave them a quiet world to live in, but to arm them against a troublesome world; and to do this, he labours to satisfy their poor hearts with his love to them, and his Father's love to them for his sake; he bequeaths unto them his peace, and empties it in the sweet consolations of it into their bosoms; for which end he tells them, as soon as he got to heaven, he would pray his Father to send the Comforter to them with all

Digitized by Google

speed, and sends them to Jerusalem, there to stay privately, and not go into the field, or openly contest with the angry world, till they received the strength and succour with the Spirit in his comforts should bring with him. By all which it doth abundantly appear, how powerful this gospel-peace is to enable the soul for suffering. Now I proceed to shew how this peace doth prepare the heart for all sufferings; and that it doth these two ways: First, As it brings along with it and possesses the soul (where it comes) with such glorious privileges, as left it above all danger and damage from any sufferings whatever, from God, man, or devils. Secondly, As it is influential to the saints' graces and affections, exciting them, and making them act to such a height, as lifts the Christian above the fear of trouble and suffering.

Section II.—First, By possessing the believing soul of such glorious privileges as secure it from any real hurt that the worst of sufferings can do it. If a man could be assured, that he might walk as safely on the waves of the sea, or in the flames of fire, as he doth in his garden, he would be no more afraid of the one, than he is to do the other; or if a man had some coat of mail secretly about him that would undoubtedly resist all blows, and quench all shot that are sent against him, it would be no such scareful thing for him to stand in the midst of swords and guns. Now the soul that is indeed at peace with God is invested with such privileges as do set it above all hurt and damage from sufferings. 'The peace of God (as said) to garrison the believer's heart and mind,' Phil. iv. 7. He is surrounded with such blessed privileges, that he is as safe as one in an impregnable castle. A person at peace with God becomes then a child of God. And when once the Christian comes to know his relation, and the dear love of his heavenly Father to him, afflictions from, or sufferings for him, dread him not, because he knows it is inconsistent with the love of a Father, either to hurt his child himself, or suffer him to be hurt by another, if he can help it. I have wondered at Isaac's patience to submit to be bound for a sacrifice, and see the knife so near his throat, without any hideous outcries or strugglings that we read of; he was old enough to be apprehensive of death, and the horror of it, being conceived by some to be above twenty years of age; that he was of good growth is out of doubt, by the wood which Abraham caused him to carry for the sacrifice; but such was the authority Abraham had over his son, and the confidence that Isaac had in his father, that he durst put his life into his hands, which had the knife been in any other hand, he would hardly have done: whoever may be the instrument of any trouble to a saint, the rod or sword is at God's disposure; Christ saw the cup in his Father's hand, and that made him take it willingly. Secondly, Every soul at peace with God, is heir to God. This follows his relation; 'If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' Rom. viii. 17. This is such a transcendent privilege, that the soul to whom the joyful news of it comes, is lifted up above the amazing and affrighting fears of any suffering. The apostle having (in the forenamed place) but a little sweetend his thoughts with a few meditations on this soul-ravishing subject, see how this blessed soul is raised into a holy slighting of all the troubles of his life; 'I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us,' ver. 18. He will not allow his own soul, or any that hath the hope of this inheritance, so far to undervalue the glory thereof, or the love of God hath settled it on them, as to mention the greatness of their sufferings in any way of pitying themselves for them. As if he had said, Hath God made us his heirs and bestowed heaven upon us in reversion; and shall we be so poor-spirited to sit down and bemoan ourselves for our present sorrows, that are no more, as to be compared with the glory that we are going to, than the little point of time (into which our short life with all our sufferings are contracted) is to be compared with the vast circumference of that eternity which we are to spend in endless bliss and happiness? He is a poor man, we say, that one or two petty losses quite undoes. And he is a poor Christian that cries out he is undone by any cross in this life; we may safely conclude such a one either is heir to nothing in the other world, or hath little or no evidence for what he hath there.

Secondly, This peace shoes and prepares the Christian for sufferings, as it is

Digitized by Google

influential to his graces and affections; making them act to such a height, as lifts him above the fear of any suffering.

First, This peace, where it is felt, makes the Christian unconquerable in his faith. Nothing is too hard for such a one to believe, that carries a pardon in his conscience, and hath his peace with God sealed to him. Moses was to meet with many difficulties in that great work of conducting Israel out of Egypt, towards Canaan; therefore to make them all a more easy conquest to his faith, when he should be assaulted with them, God gives him at his very first entering upon his charge an experiment of his mighty power in some miracles, as the turning his rod into a serpent, and that again into a rod; making his hand leprous, and then restoring it again to be as sound as before, that he might never think anything too hard for that God to do towards their salvation and deliverance, when things seemed most desperate; and how unconquerable Moses was after these in his faith, we see. Truly, when God speaks peace to a poor soul, he gives such a testimony of his almighty power and love, that so long as the sweet sense of this lasts in the soul, the creature's faith cannot be posed; what doth God, in his pardoning mercy, but turn the serpent of the law, with all its threatenings, from which the sinner fled, as that which would sting him to death, into the blossoming rod of the gospel, that brings forth the sweet fruit of peace and life? And which is the greater miracle of the two, think you, Moses's leprous hand made clean and sound, or a poor sinner's heart, leprous with sin, made clean and pure by washing in the blood of Christ? Certainly this miracle of mercy, where it is strongly believed to be done, will make it easy for that soul to trust God in a sea of temporal sufferings, and cheerfully follow him through a whole wilderness of troubles in this life. When David hath comfortable apprehensions of God's pardoning mercy, then his faith is up, and can strongly act on God for temporal deliverance. Psa. xxxii., we find him under the sweet sense of his peace with God, able to vouch God as reconciled to him; 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,' ver. 5. And now see to what a height his faith acts on God as to outward troubles, ver. 7: 'Thou art my hidding-place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble, thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverence.' He spells this, which is the less, from the other that is imcomparably the greater mercy.

Secondly, This peace with God, where it is felt, fills the heart with love to Christ. The Christian's love to Christ takes fire at Christ's love to him: and the hotter Christ's love lies on the soul, the stronger reflection doth the creature make of love to him again: 'She loved much to whom much was forgiven,' Luke vii. 47. And the more love, the less fear there will be of suffering. We will venture far for a dear friend: when Christ told his disciples, 'Lazarus was dead,' Thomas would needs go and die with him for company, John xi. 16. So powerful is love, even as strong as death: 'For a good man,' saith the apostle, 'some would even dare to die;' that is, a merciful, kind man, whose love had endeared him to them. How much more daring will a gracious soul be to sacrifice his life for a good God? 'Thy name,' saith the spouse of Christ, 'is as ointment poured forth, therefore the virgins love thee,' Cant. i. 3. Then Christ's name is poured forth, when the love of God through him is shed abroad in the soul; let this precious box be but broke, and the sweet savour of it diffused in the heart, and it will take away the unsavoury scent of the most stinking prison in the world. This heavenly fire of Christ's love, beaming powerfully on the soul, will not only put out the kitchen-fire of creature-love, but also the hell-fire, as I may call it, of slavish fear. What makes us so aghast at the thoughts of death, especially if it comes towards us in a bloody dress, and hath some circumstances of persecutors' cruelty to put a further grimness on its unpleasing countenance? Surely this comes from guilt and unacquaintance with Christ and what he hath done for us, who came partly on this very errand into the world, 'to deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage,' Heb. ii. 15. And how hath he done it but by reconciling us to God, and so reconciling us to the thoughts of death itself, as that which can only do us this kind office, to bring us and Christ, that hath done all this for us together?

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, This peace enjoyed in the Christian's bosom hath a sweet influence on his self-denial: a grace so necessary to suffering, that Christ lays the cross, as I may say, upon the back of this grace: 'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,' Mark viii. 34. Another, with Simon of Cryene, may be compelled to carry Christ's cross after him a little way; but it is the self-denying soul that will stoop willingly and down on his knees to have his burden laid on him at Christ's hand. Now the sense of a soul's peace with God will enable the creature in a twofold self-denial, and by both sweetly dispose him for any suffering from or for Christ. First, It will enable him to deny himself in his sinful self. Sin may well be called our self, it cleaves so close to us, even as our members to our body; as hard to mortify a lust as to cut off a joint. And some sins are more our self than others, as our life is more bound up in some members than others? well, let them be what they will, there is a good day in which, if Christ asks the head of the proudest lust among them all, he shall have it with less regret than Herodias obtained the Baptist's at Herod's hands. And what is that gaudy day in which the Christian can so freely deny his sin, and deliver it up to justice, but when Christ is feasting him with this hidden manna of pardon and peace? A true friend will rather deny himself than one he loves dearly, if it be in his power to grant his request; but least of all can he deny him, when his friend is doing him a greater kindness at the same time that he asks a less. No such picklock to open the heart as love. When love comes a-begging and that at a time when it is shewing itself in some eminent expression of kindness to him at whose door she knocks, there is little fear to but to speed. Esther chose that time to engage Ahasuerus's heart against Haman, her enemy, when she expressed her love most to Ahasuerus, viz., at a banquet: when doth God give, or indeed when can he give, the like demonstration of his love to a poor soul, as when he entertains it at this gospel banquet? Now sure, if ever, God may prevail with his child to send the cursed Amalekite to the gallows, his lust to the gibbet. Do you think that Mary Magdalene, when that blessed news dropped from Christ into her mournful heart, that 'her sins, which were many were all forgiven her,' could now have been persuaded to have opened the door to any of her former lovers, and gone out of these embraces of Christ's love, to have played the whore again? No; I doubt not but she would sooner have chosen the flames of martyrdom than of lust. Indeed, that which can make the creature deny a lust, can make the creature it shall not deny a cross. Secondly, The sense of this peace will enable the Christian to deny his carnal enjoyments; and these the Christian finds his great drawbacks from suffering. As the heart burns in the hot fit of love to the pleasures and profits of this world when he abounds with them; in that degree will his shaking fit of fear and grief be when Christ calls him to part with them. What the sweet wines and dainty fare of Capua were to Hannibal's soldiers, that we shall find any intemperance of heart to the creature will be to us; it will enervate our spirits, and so effeminate us, that we shall have little mind to endure hardship when drawn into the field to look an enemy in the face. Now the sense of this gospel-peace will deaden the heart to the creature, and facilitate the work of self-denial, as to the greatest enjoyments the world hath. 'God forbid,' saith St. Paul, 'that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world,' Gal. vi. 14. Paul's heart is dead to the world; now mark what gave the death-wound to his carnal affections: 'By whom,' saith he, 'the world is crucified to me, and I unto it,' that is, Christ and his cross. There was a time indeed that Paul loved the world as well as most; but since he hath been acquainted with Christ, and the mercy of God in him to his soul, pardoning his sins, and receiving him into favour and fellowship with himself, he is quite of another mind; he leaves the world, as Saul his seeking of the asses at the news of a kingdom; his haunt lies another way now. Let the Zibas of the world take the world, and all they can make of it with their best husbandry; he will not grudge them their happiness, forasmuch as his heavenly Lord and King is come in peace to his soul. None can part with the comfort of the creature so cheerfully as he who hath his mouth at the fountain-head, the love of God himself. Parents are near, and friends are dear; yet a loving wife can forget her father's house, and leave her old friends' company, to go with her

Digitized by Google

husband, though it be to a prison; how much more will a gracious soul bid adieu to these, yea, life itself, to go to Christ, especially when he hath sent the Comforter into his bosom, to cheer him in the solitariness of the way with his sweet company!

A fourth suffering grace, which the sweet sense of this gospel-peace doth promote, is patience; affliction and suffering to a patient soul are not grievious. Patience is, as one calls it, the concoctive faculty of the soul; that grace which digests all things, and turns them into good nourishment. Meats of hard digestion will not do well with squeamish, weak stomachs, and therefore they are dainty and nice in their diet; whereas men of strong stomachs, they refuse no meat that is set before them, all fare is alike to them. Truly thus there are some things of a very hard digestion to the spirits of men; the peevish, passionate, short-spirited professor will never court reproaches, prison, and death itself, but rather quarrel with his profession, if such fare as these attend the gospel. 'When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended,' Matt. xiii. 21: this will not stay in his stomach, but makes him cast up even that which else he could have kept (a profession of Christ), might he have had it with a quiet life and a whole skin. But now the patient soul, he makes his meal of what God in his providence sets before him; if peace and prosperity be served up with the gospel, he is thankful, and enjoys the sweetness of the mercy while it lasts. If God takes these away, and instead of them will have him eat the gospel-feast with sour herbs of affliction and persecution, it shall not make him sick of his cheer: it is but eating the more largely of the comforts of the gospel with them, and they go down very well wrapped up in them. Indeed the Christian is beholden to those consolations which flow from the peace of the gospel for his patience. It were impossible for the people of God to endure what sometimes they meet with from men and devils also, as they do, had they not sweet help from the sense of God's love in Christ, that lies glowing at their hearts in inward peace and joy. The apostle resolves all the saints' patience, experience, and hope, yea, glorying in their tribulations, into this, as the cause of all: 'Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us, Rom. v. 5. Sin makes suffering intolerable; when that is gone, the worst part of the trouble is removed. A light cart goes through that slough easily, where the cart deeply laden is set fast. Guilt loads the soul, and bemires it in any suffering; take that away, and let God speak peace to his soul, and he that raged before like a madman under the cross, shall carry it without wincing and whining. 'The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds, Phil. iii. Now what is patience, but the keeping of the heart and mind composed and serene in all troubles that befall us? But a word or two for application.

SECTION III.—*Use* 1. First, This informs our judgments in two particulars. First, what to judge of their patience in afflictions, that have no interest in the gospel's peace. Secondly, What to think of their peace, who in affliction have no patience at all.

First, Some you shall see very still and quiet in affliction, yet mere strangers to this peace, ignorant of Christ the peace-maker; walking in opposition to the terms God offers peace in the gospel upon, and yet very calm in affliction. Certainly all is not right with this poor creature; if he had any sense how it is with him, he would have little patience to see himself under the hand of God, and not know but it may leave him in hell before it hath done with him. When I see one run over stones and hard ways barefoot, and not complain, I do not admire his patience, but pity the poor creature that hath benumbed his feet, and as it were soled them with a brawny, dead kind of flesh, so as to lose his feeling; but save your pity much more for those whose consciences are so benumbed, and hearts petrified into a senseless stupidity, that they feel their misery no more than the stone doth the mason's saw which cuts it asunder. Of all men out of hell, none more to be pitied than he that hangs over the mouth of it, and yet is fearless of his danger; while thus, the poor wretch is incapable of all means for his good. What good does physic put into a dead man's mouth? If he cannot be chafed to some sense of his condition, all applications are in vain. And if afflictions, which are the strongest physic, leave the creature senseless, there is little hope left that any other will work upon.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, What shall we think of those that are great pretenders to this peace, yet cannot think with any patience of suffering from God or for God? Certainly, so far as the creature is acquainted with this peace, and hath the true sense of God's love in Christ lying warm at his heart, he cannot but find proportionably his heart stand ready to submit to any suffering that God lays out for him. And therefore it behoves us well to try our peace and comfort. If thou hast no heart to suffer for God, but choosest a sin to escape a cross, thy peace is false; it thou hast but little patience under ordinary afflictions, to compose thy spirit from murmuring, and sustain thy heart from sinking, thy faith on the promise is weak. 'If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small,' Prov. xxiv. 10.

Use 2. Secondly, Let this stir thee up, Christian, to be very tender and chary of thy peace with God and thy own conscience. Keep this peace clear and unbroken, and it will keep thy heart whole when the whole world breaks about thee. So long as this peace of God rules in your hearts, you are safe from fear or danger, though in a prison, or at a stake. But if thou sufferest that to be wounded, then thy enemies will come upon thee as Simeon and Levi on the men of Shechem when sore, and be too hard for thee. O it is sad, friends, you will find it so, to go with sore and smarting consciences into a suffering condition. A thorn in the foot will make any way uneasy to the traveller, and guilt in the conscience any condition uncomfortable to the Christian, but most of all a suffering one. Now, if you will keep your peace unbroken, you must bestow some attendance on it, and set as it were a life-guard about it. The choicest flowers need most looking to. The richer the treasure, the safer we lay it. This peace is thy treasure, look well where thou layest it. Two ways our Saviour tells us, that worldly treasure, such as silver and gold is, may be lost; by 'thieves that break in and carry it away, and by rust that eats and corrupts it,' Matt. vi. 19. There are two ways something like these, wherein the Christian may go by the loss in this his heavenly treasure of inward peace and comfort. Presumptuous sins, these are the thieves that break through and steal the saint's comfort away. When the Christian comes to look into his soul after such a bold act, and thinks to entertain himself, as formerly, with the comforts of his pardoned state, interest in Christ, and hopes of heaven through him, alas! he finds a sad change; no promise that will give out its consolations to him. The cellar-door is locked, Christ withdrawn, and the keys carried away with him. He may even cry out with a sad complaint, as Mary when she found not Christ's body in the sepulchre, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.' Thus the Christian may with an aching heart bemoan his folly; My pride, my uncleanness, my earthly-mindedness, they have taken away my treasure, robbed me of my comfort. I could never have a comfortable sight of God's face in any duty or promise since I fell into that foul sin. And therefore, Christian, have a care of such robbers of thy peace as this. 'The spirit of man' is called 'the candle of the Lord,' Prov. xx. 27. Hath God lighted thy candle, Christian (cheered thy spirit, I mean), with the sense of his love? take heed of presumptuous sins; if such a thief be suffered in this thy candle, thy comfort will soon come to an end. Hast thou fallen into the hands of any such presumptuous sins, that have stolen thy peace from thee? send speedily thy hue-and-cry after them. I mean, make thy sad moan to God, renew thy repentance out of hand, and raise heaven upon them by a spirit of prayer. This is no time to delay; the further thou lettest these sins go without repentance, the harder thou wilt find it to recover thy lost peace and joy out of their hands; and for thy encouragement know, God is ready, upon thy serious and solemn return, to restore thee the joy of his salvation, and do justice upon these enemies of thy soul for thee by his mortifying grace, if thou wilt prosecute the law upon them closely and vigorously, without relenting towards them, or being bribed with the pleasure, or carnal advantage, that they will not spare to offer, so their lives may be spared.

Again, as presumptuous sins are the thieves, that with a high hand rob the Christian of his comfort; so sloth and negligence are as the rust, that in time will fret into his comfort, and eat out the heart and strength of it. It is impossible that the Christian who is careless and secure in his walking, unfre-

Digitized by Google

quent or negligent in his communion with God, should long be owner of much peace or comfort that is true. What if thou dost not pour water of presumptuous sins into the lamp of thy joy, to quench it? it is enough, if thou dost not pour oil of duty to feed and maintain it. Thou art murderer to thy comfort by starving it, as well as by stabbing of it.

VER. 16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.*

THE fourth piece in the Christian panoply presents itself in this verse to our consideration; and that is, 'the shield of faith.' A grace of graces it is, and here fitly placed in the midst of the other her companions. It stands, methinks, among them, as the heart in the amidst of the body: or, if you please, as David when Samuel anointed him in the midst of his brethren, 1 Sam. xvi. 13. The apostle, when he comes to speak of this grace, he doth, as it were, lift up its head, and anoint it above all its fellows: 'Above all, take the shield of faith;' and the words easily fall into these two general parts.

First, An exhortation, 'Above all, take the shield of faith.'

Secondly, A powerful argument pressing the exhortation, 'Whereby ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.'

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPLICATION OF THE WORDS IN A FOURFOLD INQUIRY.

IN the exhortation, these four particulars call for our inquiry towards the explication of the words.

First, What faith it is that is here commended to the Christian soldier. Secondly, Having found the kind, we are to inquire what this faith is as to its nature. Thirdly, Why it is compared to a shield rather than other pieces. Fourthly, What is the importance of this, 'above all.'

SECTION I.—*Quest.* 1. First, What faith it is that here is commanded? This will soon be known, if we consider the cause and end for which it is commended to the Christian; and that is, to enable him 'to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,' *i.e.*, of the wicked one, the devil. Now, look upon the several kinds of faith; and that among them must be the faith of this place, which enables the creature to quench Satan's fiery darts; yea, all his fiery darts. Historical faith cannot do this, and therefore is not it: this is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that the devil himself, that shoots them, hath this faith, Jas. ii. 19, 'The devils believe.' Temporary faith cannot do it; this is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that itself is quenched by them. It makes a goodly blaze of profession, and 'endures for a while,' Matt. xiii. 21, but soon disappears. Miraculous faith; this falls as short as the former. Judas's miraculous faith, which he had with the other apostles (for aught that we can read), enabling him to cast devils out of others, left himself possessed of the devil of covetousness, hypocrisy, and treason, yea, a whole legion of lusts that hurried him down the hill of despair into the bottomless pit of perdition. There is only one kind of faith remains, which is it the apostle means in this place, and that is justifying faith. This indeed is a grace that makes him, who hath it, the devil's match. Satan hath not so much advantage of the Christian by the transcendency of his natural abilities, as he hath of Satan in this cause, and this his weapon. The apostle is confident to give the day to the Christian, before the fight is fully over; 'Ye have overcome the wicked one,' 1 John ii. 13: that is, you are as sure to do it, as if you were now mounted on your triumphant chariot in heaven. The knight shall overcome the giant; the saint, Satan: and the same apostle tells us what gets him the day, 1 John v. 4: 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

SECTION II.—*Quest.* The second inquiry is, What this justifying faith is?—*Ans.* I shall answer to this, first, negatively; secondly, affirmatively.

First, Negatively, in two particulars. First, Justifying faith is not a naked assent to the truths of the gospel. This justifying faith doth give, but this doth not make it justifying faith. A dogmatical faith, or historical, is comprehended in

Digitized by Google

justifying faith; but dogmatical faith doth not infer justifying faith. Justifying faith cannot be without a dogmatical; it implies it, as the rational soul in man doth the sensitive. But the dogmatical may be without the justifying, as the sensitive soul in the beast is without the rational. Judas knew the Scriptures, and, without doubt, did assent to the truth of them, when he was so zealous a preacher of the gospel; but he never had so much as one grain of justifying faith in his soul, John vi. 64: 'There are some of you which believe not; for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him;' yea, Judas's master, the devil himself, one far enough, I suppose, from justifying faith, yet he assents to the truth of the word. He goes against his conscience when he denies them; when he tempted Christ he did not dispute against the Scripture, but from the Scripture, drawing his arrows out of this quiver, Matt. iv. 6. And at another time he makes as full a confession of Christ (for the matter) as Peter himself did, Matt. viii. 22, compared with Matt. xvi. 17. Assent to the truth of the word is but an act of the understanding, which reprobates and devils may exercise. But justifying faith is a compounded habit, and hath its seat both in the understanding and will; and therefore called a believing with the heart, Rom. x. 10; yea, a believing with all the heart, Acts viii. 37: 'Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest.' It takes in all the powers of the soul. There is a double object in the promise; one proper to the understanding, to move that; another proper to the will, to excite and work upon that. As the promise is true, so it calls for an act of an assent from the understanding; and as it is good as well as true, so it calls for an act of the will to embrace and receive it; therefore he which only notionally knows the promise, and speculatively assents to the truth of it, without clinging to it and embracing of it, he doth not believe savingly, and can have no more benefit from the promise than the nourishment from the food he sees, and acknowledgeth to be wholesome, but eats none of it. Secondly, Faith is not assurance. If it were, John might have spared his pains, who wrote 'to them that believed on the name of the Son of God, that they might know that they had eternal life,' 1 John v. 13. They might then have said, We do this already; what else is our faith, but a believing that we are such as through Christ are pardoned, and shall through him be saved? But this cannot be so: if faith were assurance, then a man's sins would be pardoned before he believes; for he must necessarily be pardoned before he can know he is pardoned. The candle must be lighted before I can see it is lighted. The child must be born before I can be assured it is born. The object must be before the act. Assurance is rather the fruit of faith, than faith itself; it is in faith as the flower is in the root; faith in time, after much communion with God, acquaintance with the word, and experience of his dealings with the soul, may flourish into assurance; but, as the root truly lives before the flower appears, and continues when that hath shed its beautiful leaves, and is gone again; so doth true justifying faith live before assurance comes, and after it disappears. Assurance is, as it were, the cream of faith. Now you know there is milk before there is cream; this riseth not but after some time standing, and there remains milk after it is skimmed off. How many, alas! of the precious saints of God must we shut out from being believers, if no faith but what amounts to assurance! We must needs offend against the generation of God's children, among whom some are babes not yet come to the use of their reflex act of faith, so as to own the grace of God in them to be true, upon the review that they take of their own actings: and must not the child be allowed to be a child till he can speak of himself, and say he is so? Others there are in Christ's family who are of higher stature and greater experience in the ways of God, yet have lost those apprehensions of pardoning mercy which once they were (through the goodness of God) able to have shewn. Shall we say their faith went away in the departure of their assurance? How oft then in a year may a believer be no believer! even as often as God withdraws and leaves the creature in the dark. Assurance is like the sunflower, which opens with the day, and shuts with the night. It follows the motion of God's face; if that looks smilingly on the soul, it lives; if that frowns or hides itself, it dies. But faith is a plant that can grow in the shade,—a grace that can find the way to heaven in a dark night. It can 'walk in darkness, and yet trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. l. 10. In a word, by making the essence

Digitized by Google

of faith to lie in assurance, we should not only offend against the generation of God's children, but against the God and Father of these children, for at one clap we turn the greater number of those children he hath here on earth out of doors; yea, we are cruel to those that he is most tender of, and make sad the hearts of those that he would have chiefly comforted. Indeed, if this were true, a great part of gospel provision laid up in the promises is of little use. We read of promises to those that mourn, 'they shall be comforted;' to the contrite, 'they shall be revived;' to him that walks in darkness, Isa. l., and the like. These belong to believers, and none else; surely then there are some believers that are in the dark, under the hatches of sorrow, wounded and broken with their sins, and temptation for them, but they are not such as are assured of the love of God; their water is turned into joy, their night into light, their sighs and sobs into joy and praise.

Secondly, I shall answer affirmatively, what justifying faith is; and in the description of it I shall consider it solely as justifying. And so take it in these few words; it is that act of the soul whereby it rests on Christ crucified for pardon and life, and that upon the warrant of the promise. In the description observe, First, The subject where faith is seated; not any single faculty, but the soul. Of this I have spoken something before. Secondly, Here is the object of faith as justifying, and that is Christ crucified. The whole truth of God is the object of justifying faith; it trades with the whole word of God, and doth firmly assent unto it; but in its justifying act it singles out Christ crucified for its object. First, The person of Christ is the object of faith as justifying. Secondly, Christ as crucified. First, The person of Christ, not any axiom or proposition in the word; this is the object of assurance, not of faith. Assurance saith, I believe my sins are pardoned through Christ; faith's language is, I believe on Christ for the pardon of them. The word of God doth direct our faith to Christ, and terminates it upon him; called therefore a coming to Christ, Matt. xi. 28; a receiving of him, John i. 12; a believing on him, John xvii. 20. The promise is but the dish, in which Christ, the true food of the soul, is served up; and if faith's hand be on the promise, it is but as one that draws the dish to him, that he may come at the dainties in it. The promise is the marriage ring on the hand of faith. Now we are not married to the ring, but with it unto Christ. 'All promises,' saith the apostle, 'are yea and amen in him;' they have their excellency from him, and efficacy in him: I mean in a soul's union to him. To run away with a promise, and not to close with Christ, and by faith become one in him, is as if a man should rend a branch from a tree, and lay it up in his chest, expecting it to bear fruit there. Promises are dead branches severed from Christ; but when a soul by faith becomes united to Christ, then he partakes of all his fatness; not a promise but yields sweetness to it. Secondly, As Christ is the primary object of faith, so Christ as crucified. Not Christ in his personal excellencies; so he is the object rather of our love than faith; but as bleeding, and that to death, under the hand of divine justice, for to make an atonement by God's own appointment for the sins of the world. As the handmaid's eye is on her mistress's hand for direction, so faith's eye is on God's revealing himself in his word; which way God by it points the soul, thither it goes. Now there faith finds God, intending to save poor sinners, pitched on Christ, and Christ alone, for the transacting and effecting of it; and him whom God chooseth to trust with the work, him and him alone will faith choose to lay the burden of her confidence on. Again, faith observes how Christ performed this great work; and accordingly how the promise holds him forth to be applied for pardon and salvation. Now faith finds, that then Christ made the full payment to the justice of God for sin, when he poured out his blood to death upon the cross; all the preceding acts of his humiliation were put preparatory to this. He was born to die; he was sent into the world as a lamb bound with the bonds of an irreversible decree for a sacrifice. Christ himself, when he came into the world, understood this to be the errand he was sent on, Heb. x. 5: 'When he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldst not, but a body thou hast prepared me,' *i. e.*, to be an expiatory sacrifice; without this, all he had done would have been labour undone. No redemption, but by his blood, Eph. i. 7: 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins.'

Digitized by Google

No church without his blood, Acts xx. 28: 'The church of God, which he hath purchased with his blood:' *E latere Christi morientis exlitit ecclesia.* The church is taken out of dying Jesus's side, as Eve out of sleeping Adam's Christ did not redeem and save poor souls by sitting in majesty on his heavenly throne, but by hanging on the shameful cross, under the tormenting hand of man's fury, and God's just wrath. And therefore the poor soul, that would have pardon of sin, is directed to place his faith not only on Christ, but on bleeding Christ, Rom. iii. 25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Thirdly, The act of faith upon this object: and that is, resting on Christ crucified for pardon and life. I know there are many acts of the soul antecedent to this, without which the creature can never truly exercise this. As knowledge, especially of God and Christ, upon whose authority and testimony it relies: 'I know whom I have believed,' 2 Tim. i. 12. None will readily trust a stranger, that he is wholly unacquainted with. Abraham went indeed he knew not whither, but he did not go with he knew not who. The great thing that God laboured to instruct Abraham in, and satisfy him with, was the knowledge of his own glorious self, who he was; that he might take his word, and rely on it, how harsh and improbable, yea, impossible soever it might sound in sense or reason's ear: 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.' Secondly, Assent to the truth of the word of God. If this foundation-stone be not laid, faith's building cannot go on. Who will trust him that he dares not think speaks true? Thirdly, A sense of our own vileness and emptiness. By the one to see our demerit, what we deserve, hell and damnation: by the other our own impotency, how little we can contribute, yea, just nothing, to our own reconciliation. I join them together, because the one ariseth out of the other; sense of this emptiness comes from the deep apprehension a soul hath of the other's fulness in him. You never knew a man full of self-confidence and self-abasement together. The conscience cannot abound with the sense of sin, and the heart with self-conceit at the same time. 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died,' Rom. vii. 9. That is, when the commandment came in the accusations of it to his conscience, sin, that like a sleepy lion had lain still, and he secure and confident by it, when that began to roar in his conscience, then he died; that is, his vain confidence of himself gave up the ghost. Both these are necessary to faith; sense of sin, like the smart of a wound, to make the creature think of a plaster to cure it; and sense of emptiness and insufficiency in himself or any creature to do the cure necessary to make him go out to Christ for cure. We do not go abroad to beg what we have of our own within doors. These, with some other are necessary to faith; but the receiving of Christ, and resting on Christ, is that act of faith to which justification is promised, John iii. 18: 'He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' Now every one that assents to the truth of what the Scripture saith of Christ, doth not believe on Christ. No, this believing on Christ implies an union of the soul to Christ, and fiduciary recumbency on Christ. Therefore we are bid to take hold of Christ, Isa. xxvii. 5 (who is there called God's strength, as elsewhere his arm), 'that we may make peace with God, and we shall make peace with him.' It is not the sight of a man's arm stretched out to a man in the water will save him from drowning, but the taking hold of it. Christ is a stone; faith builds upon Christ for salvation; and how, but by laying its whole weight and expectation of mercy on him? What Paul, 2 Tim. i. 12, calls believing, in the former part of the verse, he calls, in the latter part, a committing to him to be kept against that day. The fourth and last branch in the description, is the warrant and security that faith goes upon in this act. And this it takes from the promise: indeed there is in no way how God can be conceived to contract a debt to his creature but by promise. There are ways for men to become debtors one to another, though never any promise passed from them. The father is a debtor to his child, and owes him love, provision, and nurture. The child a debtor to his parent, and owes him honour and obedience, though neither of them promised this to each other. Much more doth the creature stand deep in God's debt-book, and owes himself, with all he

Digitized by Google

hath, to God his maker, though he hath not the grace voluntarily to make these over to God by promise and covenant. But the great God is so absolute a Sovereign, that none can make a law to bind him but himself: till he be pleased to pass an act of grace, of his own good-will, to give this, or do that good thing, to and for his poor creatures, no claim can be laid to the least mercy at his hands. There are two things therefore that are greatly to be heeded by the soul that would believe.

First, He must inquire for a promise to bear his faith out and warrant him to expect such a mercy at God's hand. And then, secondly, when he hath found a promise and observed the terms well on which it runs, not to stay for any further encouragement, but upon the credit of the naked promise to set his faith on work. First, To inquire out a promise, and observe well the terms on which at runs. Indeed upon the point it comes all to one, to believe without a promise, or to believe on a promise but not observe the terms of it. Both are presumptuous, and speed alike. A prince hath as much reason to be angry with him that doth not keep close to his commission, as with another that acts without any commission. O how little considered is this by many, who make bold of God's arm to lean on for pardon and salvation, but never think, that the promise which presents Christ to be leaned on as a Saviour, presents him at the same time to be chosen as a Lord and Prince! Such were the rebellious Israelites, who durst make God and his promise a leaning-stock for their foul elbows to rest upon: 'They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel,' Isa. xlviii. 2. But they were more bold than welcome. God rejected their confidence, and loathed their sauciness. Though a prince would not disdain to let a poor wounded man, faint with bleeding, and unable to go alone, upon his humble request, make use of his arm, rather than he should perish in the streets; yet he would with indignation reject the same motion from a filthy drunkard, that is besmeared with his vomit, if he should desire leave to lean on him, because he cannot go alone. I am sure how welcome soever, the poor humble soul, that lies bleeding for his sins at the very mouth of hell in his own thoughts, is to God, when he comes upon the encouragement of the promise to lean on Christ; yet the profane wretch that emboldens himself to come to Christ, shall be kicked away with infinite disdain and abhorency by a holy God for abusing his promise.

Secondly, When a poor sinner hath found a promise, and observes the terms with a heart willing to embrace them, now he is to put forth an act of faith upon the credit of the naked promise, without staying for any other encouragement elsewhere. Faith is a right pilgrim-grace; it travels with us to heaven, and when it sees us safe got within our Father's doors (heaven I mean), it takes leave of us. Now the promise is this pilgrim's staff, with which it sets forth, though (like Jacob on his way to Padan-Aram) it hath nothing else with it. 'Remember thy word unto thy servant,' saith David, 'upon which thou hast caused me to hope.' Psalm cxviii. 49. The word of promise was all he had to shew; and he counts that enough to set his faith on work. But, alas! some make comfort the ground of faith, and experience their warrant to believe. They will believe when God manifests himself to them, and sends in some sensible demonstration of his love to their souls; but till this be done, the promise hath little authority to silence their unbelieving cavils, and quiet their misgiving hearts into a waiting on God for the performance of what there is spoke from God's own mouth. Like old Jacob, who gave no credit to his children, when they told him Joseph was yet alive, and governor over all the land of Egypt. This news was too good and great to enter into his belief, who had given him up for dead so long; it is said, 'His heart fainted, for he believed them not,' Gen. xxv. 6. But when he saw the waggons that Joseph had sent to carry him thither, then, it is said, 'the spirit of Jacob revived,' ver. 27. Truly thus, though the promise tells the poor humbled sinner, Christ is alive, Governor of heaven itself, with all power there and on earth put into his hand, that he may give eternal life to all that believe on him, and he be therefore exhorted to rest upon Christ in the promise; yet his heart faints, and believes not: it is the waggons he would fain see, some sensible expressions of God's love that he listens after; if he did but know that he was an elect person, or were one that

Digitized by Google

God did love, then he would believe. But God hath little reason to thank him in the meantime for suspending his faith till these come. This is, as I may so say, to believe for spiritual loves, and is rather sense than faith.

SECTION III.—*Quest.* 3. Why is faith compared to a shield?—*Ans.* For a double resemblance there is between this grace and that piece of armour.

First, The shield is not for the defence of any particular part of the body, as almost all the other pieces are: helmet fitted for the head; plate designed for the breast; and so others, they have their several parts, which they are fastened to: but the shield is a piece that is intended for the defence of the whole body. It was used therefore to be made very large; for its broadness, called a gate or door, because so long and large, as in a manner to cover the whole body; to which that place alludes, Psa. v. 12, 'Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour thou wilt compass him as with a shield.' And if the shield were not large enough at once to cover every part, yet being a moveable piece of armour, the skilful soldier might turn it this way or that way, to catch the blow or arrow from lighting on any part they were directed to. And this, indeed, doth excellently well set forth the universal use that faith is of to the Christian. It defends the whole man: every part of the Christian by it is preserved. Sometimes the temptation is levelled at his head; Satan, he will be disputing against this truth and that, to make the Christian, if he can, call them into question, merely because his reason and understanding cannot comprehend them; and he prevails with some that do not think themselves the unwisest in the world, upon this very account, to blot the Deity of Christ, with other mysterious truths of the gospel, quite out of their creed. Now faith interposeth between the Christian and this arrow. It comes in to the relief of the Christian's weak understanding as seasonably as Zeruiah did to David, when the giant Ishbibenob thought to have slain him. I will trust the word of God, saith the believer, rather than my own purblind reason. 'Abraham, not being weak in faith, considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. iv. 19. If sense should have had the hearing of that business; yea, if that holy man had put it to a reference between sense and reason also, what resolution his thoughts should come to concerning this strange message that was brought him, he would have been in danger of calling the truth of it in question, though God himself was the messenger; but faith brought him honourably off. Again, Is it the conscience that the tempter assaults? (and it is not seldom that he is shooting his fiery darts of horror and terror at this mark), faith receives the shock, and saves the creature harmless. 'I had fainted unless I had believed,' saith David, Psa. xxvii. 13. He means when false witnesses rose up against him, and such as breathed out cruelty, as appears, verse 12; faith was his best fence against man's charge, and so it is against Satan's and conscience's also. Never was man in a sadder condition than the poor jailor, Acts xvi.; much ado he had to keep his own hands from offering violence to himself; who that had seen him fall trembling at Paul and Silas's feet, with that sad question in his mouth, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ver. 30, could have thought this deep wound that was now given his conscience would so soon have been closed and cured, as we find it? ver. 34. The earthquake of horror that did so dreadfully shake his conscience is gone, and his trembling turned into rejoicing: now, mark what made this blessed calm: 'Believe,' saith Paul, 'on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved,' ver. 31. And, ver. 34, it is said, 'He rejoiced, believing in God with his whole house.' It is faith stills the storm which sin had raised; faith that changed his doleful note into joy and gladness. Happy man he was, that had such skilful chirurgeons so near him, who could direct him the nearest way to a cure. Again, is it the will that the temptation is laid to catch? Some commands of God cannot be obeyed without much self-denial, because they cross us in that which our own wills are carried forth, very strongly to desire; so that we must deny our will, before we can do the will of God. Now a temptation comes very forcibly when it runs with the tide of our own wills. What, saith Satan, wilt thou serve a God that thus thwarts thee in everything? If thou lovest anything more than other, presently he must have that from thee; no lamb in all the flock will serve for a sacrifice, but Isaac, Abraham's only child, he must be offered up. No place will content God, that Abraham should serve him in, but where he must live in banishment from his dear rela-

Digitized by Google

tions and acquaintance. Wilt thou, saith Satan, yield to such hard terms as these? Now faith is the grace that doth the soul admirable service at such a pinch as this. It is able to appease the tumult, which such a temptation may raise in the soul, and dismiss the route of all mutinous thoughts; yea, to keep the King of heaven's peace so sweetly in the Christian's bosom, that such a temptation, if it comes, shall find few or none to declare for it. Heb. xi. 8, 'By faith,' it is said, 'Abraham obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither.' And we do not read of one fond look that his heart cast back upon his dear native country, as he went from it, so well pleased had faith made him with his journey. It was hard work for Moses to strip himself of his magistrate's robes, and put his hands on his servant's head; hard to leave another to enter upon his labours, and reap the honour of lodging the Israelites' colours in Canaan, after it had cost him so many a weary step to bring them within sight of it; yet faith made him willing. He saw better robes that he should put on in heaven, than those he was called to put off on earth. The lowest place in glory is beyond all compare greater preferment than the highest place of honour here below; to stand before the throne there, and minister to God in immediate service, than to sit in a throne on earth, and have all the world waiting at his foot.

Secondly, The shield doth not only defend the whole body, but is a defence to the soldier's armour also; it keeps the arrow from the helmet as well as head, from the breast and breastplate also. Thus faith, it is armour upon armour, a grace that preserves all the other graces. But of this more hereafter.

SECTION IV.—*Quest.* 4. What doth this, 'above all,' import?—*Ans.* There is variety among interpreters about it. Jerome reads it, *In omnibus, sumentes scutum fidei;* In all things, taking the shield of faith, *i. e.*, in all duties, enterprises, temptations, or afflictions, whatever you are called to do or suffer, take faith; indeed, faith to the Christian is like fire to the chemist; nothing can be done without it Christianly: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God,' Heb. xi. 6. And how can the Christian please himself in that wherein he doth not please his God? Others read it, 'Over all, take the shield of faith,' *i. e.*, take it over all your graces, as that which will cover them. All other graces have their safety from faith; they lie secure under the shadow of faith, as an army lies safe under the protection and command of a strong castle planted round with cannon. But we shall follow our translation, as being most comprehensive, and that which will take these within its compass. 'Above all, take,' &c.; that is, among all the pieces of armour which you are to provide, and wear for your defence, let this have the pre-eminence of your care to get; and having got, to keep it. Now, that the apostle meant to give a pre-eminence to faith above all other graces, appears, First, By the piece of armour he compares it to, 'the shield,' which of old was prized above all other pieces by soldiers. They counted it greater shame to lose their shield than to lose the field! and, therefore, when under the very foot of their enemy, they would not part with it, but esteemed it an honour to die with their shield in their hand. It was the charge that one laid upon her son, going into the wars, when she gave him a shield, that he should either bring his shield home with him, or he be brought home upon it; she had rather see him dead with it, than come home without it. Secondly, By the noble effect which is here ascribed to faith; 'By which ye shall quench the fiery darts of the wicked.' The other pieces are nakedly commended. Take 'the girdle of truth, breastplate of righteousness,' and so the rest, but nothing singly ascribed to any of them, what they can do; but when he speaks of faith, he ascribes the whole victory to it: this quencheth all the fiery darts of the wicked. And why thus? are the other graces of no use, and doth faith do all? What need then the Christian load himself with more than this one piece? I answer, every piece hath its necessary use in the Christian's warfare; not any part of the whole suit can be spared in the day of battle; but the reason (I humbly conceive) why no particular effect is annexed severally to each of these, but all ascribed to faith, is to let us know that all these graces, their efficacy, and our benefit from them, is in their conjunction with faith, and influence they receive from faith; so that this is plainly the design of the Spirit of God, to give faith the precedency in our care above the rest; only take heed that you do not fancy any indifferency or negligence to be

Digitized by Google

allowed you in your endeavours after the other graces, because you are more strongly provoked and excited up to the getting and keeping this. The apostle would intend your care here, but not remit it there. Cannot we bid a soldier, above all parts of his body, to beware of a wound at his heart, but he must needs think presently he need take no care to guard his head? Truly such a one would deserve a cracked crown to cure him of his folly. The words thus opened, we shall content ourselves with one general observation from them.

CHAPTER II.

SHEWETH THE PRE-EMINENCE OF FAITH ABOVE OTHER GRACES, IN FOUR PARTICULARS.

Doct. 1. THAT faith, of all graces, is the chief, and chiefly to be laboured for. There is a precedency or pre-eminence peculiar to this above all other; it is among graces as the sun is among the planets, or as Solomon's virtuous woman among the daughters, Prov. xxxi. 29. Though every grace hath done virtuously, yet thou, O faith, excellest them all. The apostle, indeed, gives the precedency to love, and sets faith on the lower hand, 1 Cor. xiii. 13: 'Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest is charity;' yet you may observe, that this prelation of it before faith, hath a particular respect to the saints' blissful state in heaven, where love remains, and faith ceaseth; in which regard love indeed is the greater, because it is the end of our faith; we apprehend by faith, that we may enjoy by love: but if we consider the Christian's present state, while militant on earth, in this respect love must give place to faith. It is true, love is the grace that shall triumph in heaven; but it is faith, not love, which is the conquering grace here on earth: 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' 1 John v. 4. Love, indeed, hath its place in the battle, and doth excellent service, but it is under faith, its leader, Gal. v. 6: 'faith which worketh by love;' even as the captain fighteth by his soldiers, whom he leads on, so faith works by love, which it excites. Love, it is true, is the grace that at last possesseth the inheritance; but it is faith that gives the Christian right unto it, without which he should never have enjoyed it, John i. 12: 'To as many as received him, he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.' In a word, it is love that unites God and glorified saints together in heaven; but it was faith that first united them to Christ, while they were on earth, Eph. v. 17: 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' And if Christ had not dwelt in them by faith on earth, they should never have dwelt with God in heaven. But I proceed to shew wherein it appears, that faith hath such a prelation above other graces, which take in these following particulars.

SECTION I.—First, In the great inquiry that God makes after faith above all other graces. Nothing more speaks our esteem of persons or things, than our inquiry after them. We ask first and most for those that stand highest in our thought. 'Is your father well,' said Joseph; 'the old man of whom ye spake, is he alive?' Gen. xliii. 27. No doubt there were others of whose welfare Joseph would have been glad to hear also, but being most pent and pained with a natural affection to his father, he easeth himself of this first. And when David asked for Absalom above all others, 'Is the young man Absalom safe?' and over again with it to Cush, 2 Sam. xviii., it was easy to guess how high he valued his life. Now you shall find the great inquiry that God makes is for faith: 'When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Luke xviii. 8; implying, that this is the grace which he will especially look for, and desires to find. We read, John ix., of a great miracle, a man by Christ restored to his sight, that was born blind. This so enraged the malicious Pharisees, that they excommunicate the poor man for no other fault but giving his merciful physician a good word. This brings Christ the sooner to him; so tender is he of those that suffer for him, that they shall not long want his sweet company; and he hath no cause to complain for being cast out of man's society, that gains Christ's presence by the same. Now observe what Christ saith to him at his first meeting, ver. 35: 'Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' The

Digitized by Google

man had already expressed some zeal for Christ, in vindicating him, and speaking well of him to the head of the bitterest enemies he had on earth, for which he was now a sufferer at their hands. This was very commendable: but there is one thing that Christ prizeth above all this, and that is faith. This he inquires after; 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' As if he had said, All this thy zeal in speaking for me, and patience in suffering, are nothing worth in my account, except thou hast faith also. Indeed, most of God's dealings with his people, what are they, but inquiries after faith, either the truth or strength of it? When he afflicts them, it is for the trial of their faith, 1 Pet. i. 7. Afflictions, they are God's spade and mattock, by which he digs into his people's hearts, to find out this gold of faith; not but that he inquires for other graces also, but this is named for all, as the chief, which found, all the other will soon appear. When God seems to delay, and makes, as it were, a halt in his providence, before he comes with the mercy he promiseth, and we pray for, it is exploratory to faith. 'O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. xv. 28. She had received her answer without so much ado; only Christ had a mercy in store for her more than she thought of; with the granting of her suit in the cure of her daughter he had a mind to give her the evidence of her faith also, and the high esteem God hath of this grace, as that which may have of him what it will.

SECTION II.—The commendations that are given to faith above other graces. You shall observe, that in the same action, wherein other graces are eminently exercised as well as faith, even then faith is taken notice of, and the crown set upon faith's head, rather than any of the other. We hear nothing almost of any other grace throughout the whole eleventh of the Hebrews, but faith; 'By faith Abraham, by faith Jacob,' and the rest of those worthies, did all those famous exploits. There was a concurrence of the other graces with faith in them all; but all goes under the name of faith: the whole army fight, yet the general or captain hath the honour of the victory ascribed to him. Alexander's and Cæsar's names are transmitted to posterity as the great conquerors that overcame so many battles, not the private soldiers that fought under them. Faith is the captain-grace; all those famous acts of those saints are recorded as the achievements of faith. Thus, concerning the centurion, Matt. viii. 10: 'Verily,' saith Christ, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.' There were other graces very eminent in the centurion besides his faith; his conscientious care of his poor servant, for whom he could have done no more if he had been his own child. There are some that call themselves Christians, yet would not have troubled themselves so much for a sick servant; such, alas! are often less regarded in sickness than their master's beast. But especially his humility; this shined forth very eminently in that self-abasing expression, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof,' ver. 8. Consider but his calling, and degree therein, and it makes his humility more conspicuous. A swordsman, yea, a commander, such use to speak big and high. Power is seldom a friend to humility. Surely he was a man of rare humble spirit, that he, whose mouth was used so much to words of command over his soldiers, could so dimit and humble himself in his address to Christ; yet his faith outshines his humility in its greatest strength. Not, I have not found such humility, but such faith, in all Israel. As if Christ had said, There is not one believer in all Israel but I know him, and how rich he is in faith also; but I have not found so much of this heavenly treasure in any one's hand as in this centurion's. Indeed, the Christian's chief riches are in faith's hand. 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?' James ii. 5. Why rich in faith rather than rich in patience, rich in love, or any other grace? Oh, great reason for it; when the creature comes to lay claim to pardon of sin, the favour of God and heaven itself, it is not love, patience, &c., but faith alone that lays down the price of all these. Not, Lord, pardon, save me, here is my love and patience for it; but, Here is Christ, and the price of his blood, which faith presents thee for the full purchase of them all. And this leads to a third, and indeed the chief of all.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, The high office that faith is set in above other graces in the business of our justification before God. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. v. 1. Not justified by love, repentance, patience, or any other grace beside faith. O how harsh doth it sound in a

Digitized by Google

Christian's ear, justifying patience, justifying repentance! and if they were concerned in the act of justification, as faith is, the name would as well become them as it doth faith itself. But we find this appropriated to faith, and the rest hedged out from having to do in the act of justification, though included and supposed in the person who is justified. It is faith that justifies without works. This is Paul's task to prove, Rom. iii. But this faith which justifies is not dead or idle, but a lively, working faith, which seems to be James's design, chap. ii. of his Epistle. As God did single Christ out from all others, to be the only mediator between him and man, and his righteousness to be the meritorious cause of our justification, so he hath singled faith out from all other graces, to be the instrument or means for appropriating this righteousness of Christ to ourselves. Therefore as this righteousness is called 'the righteousness of God,' and opposed to our own righteousness, though wrought by God in us, Rom. x. 3, because it is wrought by Christ for us, but not inherent in us as the other is? so also it is called 'the righteousness of faith,' Rom. iv, 11, 13; not the righteousness of repentance, love, or any other grace. Now wherefore is it called the righteousness of faith, and not of love, repentance, &c.? Surely, not that faith itself is our righteousness; then we should be justified by works, while we are justified by faith, contrary to the apostle, who opposeth faith and works, Rom. iv. In a word, then, we should be justified by a righteousness of our own, for faith is a grace inherent in us, and as much our own work as any grace besides is. But this is as contrary to the same apostle's doctrine, Phil. iii. 9, where our own righteousness, and the righteousness which is by faith, are declared to be inconsistent. It can therefore be called the righteousness of faith, for this reason and no other, because faith is the only grace whose office it is to lay hold on Christ, and so to appropriate his righteousness for justification to our souls. Christ and faith are relatives, which must not be severed. Christ he is the treasure, and faith the hand which receives it. Christ's righteousness is the robe, faith the hand that puts it on; so that it is Christ who is the treasure. By his blood he dischargeth our debt, and not faith; whose office is only to receive Christ, whereby he becomes ours. It is Christ's righteousness that is the robe which covers our nakedness, and makes us beautiful in God's eye, only faith hath the honour to put the rob on the soul; and it is no small honour that is therein put upon faith above other graces. As God graced Moses exceedingly above the rest of his brethren, the Israelites, when he was called up the mount to receive the law from God's mouth, while they had their bounds set them, to stand waiting at the bottom of the hill till he brought it down to them; so doth God highly honour faith, to call this up as the grace by whose hand he will convey this glorious privilege of justification over to us.

Quest. But why is faith, rather than any grace else, employed in this act?—*Ans.* First, Because there is no grace hath so proper a fitness for this office as faith. Why hath God appointed the eye to see, and not the ear? Why the hand to take our food, rather than the foot? It is easily answered; because these members have a particular fitness for these functions, and not the other. Thus, faith hath a fitness for this work peculiar to itself; we are justified, not by giving anything to God of what we do, but by receiving from God what Christ hath done for us. Now faith is the only receiving grace, and therefore only fit for this office.

Secondly, There is no grace that God could trust his honour so safely with in this business of justification as with faith. The great design God hath in justifying a poor sinner, is to magnify his free mercy in the eye of his creature: this is written in such fair characters in the word, that he which runs may read it. God was resolved that his free mercy should go away with all the honour, and the creature should be quite cut out from any pretensions to partnership with him therein. Now no way like to this of being justified by faith, for the securing and safe-guarding the glory of God's free grace, Rom. iii. 25, 26. When the apostle hath in some verses together discoursed of the free justification of a sinner before God, he goes on to shew how this cuts the very comb, yea, throat of all self-exalting thoughts, ver. 27: 'Where is boasting, then? it is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.' Princes, of all wrongs, most disdain and abhor to see their royal bed defiled; so

Digitized by Google

jealous they have been of this, that for the prevention of all suspicion of such a foul act it hath been of old the custom of the greatest monarchs, that those who were their favourites, and admitted into the nearest attendance upon their own persons and queens, should be eunuchs; such whose very disability of nature might remove all suspicion of any such attempt by them. Truly God is more jealous of having the glory of his grace ravished by the pride and self-glorying of the creature than ever any prince was of having his queen deflowered. And therefore to secure it from any such horrid abuse he hath chosen faith, this eunuch-grace, as I may so call it, to stand so nigh him, and be employed by him in this high act of grace, whose very nature, being a self-emptying grace, renders it incapable of entering into any such design against the glory of God's grace. Faith hath two hands; with one it pulls off its own righteousness, and throws it away, as David did Saul's armour; with the other it puts on Christ's righteousness over the soul's shame, as that in which alone it dares see God, or be seen of him. 'This makes it impossible,' saith learned and holy Master Ball, 'how to conceive that faith and works should be conjoined as con-causes in justification, seeing the one, that is, faith, attributes all to the free grace of God; the other, that is, works, challenge all to themselves; the one, that is, faith, will aspire no higher, but to be the instrumental cause of free remission; the other can sit no lower, but to be the matter of justification, if any cause at all; for if works be accounted to us in the room or place of exact obedience in free justification, do not they supply the place? are they not advanced to the dignity of works complete and perfect in justification from justice?'—*Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, p. 70.

Section IV.—Fourthly, The mighty influence, yea, universal, that faith hath upon all her sister graces, speaks her the chief of them all. What makes the sun so glorious a creature, but because it is a common good, and serves all the lower world with light and influence? Faith is a grace, whose ministry God useth as much for the good of the spiritual world in the saints, called in the Scripture, the 'new creation,' Gal. vi. 15, as he doth the sun for the corporeal. 'Nothing is hid from the heat of the sun,' Psa. xix. 6. And no grace that faith's influence reacheth not unto.

First, Faith finds all the graces with work. As the rich tradesman gives out his wool, some to this man, and some to that, who all spin and work of the stock he gives them out, so that when he ceaseth to trade they must also, because they have no stock but what he affords them; thus faith gives out to every grace what they act upon. If faith trades not, neither can they. To instance in one or two graces for all the rest. Repentance, this is a sweet grace, but set on work by faith. Nineveh's repentance is attributed unto their faith, Jonah iii. 5: 'The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth.' It is very like indeed that their repentance was no more than legal, but it was as good as their faith was. If their faith had been better, so would their repentance also. All is silence and quiet in an unbelieving soul; no news of repentance, no noise of any complaint made against sin, till faith begins to stir. When faith presents the threatening, and binds the truth and terror of it to the conscience, then the sinner hath something to work upon. As light actuates colours, and brings the eye acquainted with its object, whereupon it falls to work, so doth faith actuate sin in the conscience. Now musing thoughts will soon rise, and, like clouds, thicken apace into a storm, till they bespread the soul with an universal blackness of horror and trembling for sin. But then also the creature is at a loss, and can go no farther in the business of repentance, till faith sends in more work from the promise, by presenting a pardon therein to the returning soul; which no sooner is heard and believed by the creature, but the work of repentance goes on apace. Now the cloud of horror and terror, which the fear of wrath, from consideration of threatening, had gathered in the conscience, dissolves into a soft rain of evangelical sorrow, at the report which faith makes from the promise. Love is another heavenly grace; but faith gathers the fuel that makes the fire. Speak, Christian, whose soul now flames with love to God, was it always thus? No, there was a time, I dare say for thee, when thy hearth was cold, not a spark of this fire to be found on the altar of thy heart. How is it, then, Christian, that now thy soul loves God, whom before thou

Digitized by Google

didst scorn and hate? Surely thou hast heard some good news from heaven, that hath changed thy thoughts of God, and turned the stream of thy love, which ran another way, into this happy channel. And who can be the messenger besides faith, that brings any good news from heaven to the soul? It is faith that proclaims the promise, opens Christ's excellences, pours out his name, for which the virgins love him. When faith hath drawn a character of Christ out of the word, and presented him in his love and loveliness to the soul, now the creature is sweetly inveigled in his affections to him; now the Christian hath a copious theme to enlarge upon in his thoughts, whereby to endear Christ more and more unto him. 'Unto him that believeth, he is precious,' 1 Pet. ii. 7; and the more faith, the more precious. If we should sit in the same room by the dearest friend we had in all the world, and our eyes were held from seeing him, we would take no more notice of him, and give no more respect to him than a mere stranger; but if one should come and whisper us in the ear, and tell us, 'This is such a dear friend of yours, that once laid down his life to save yours; that hath made you heirs to all the goodly estate that he hath; will you not shew your respect to him?' O how our hearts would work in our breasts, and make haste to come forth in some passionate expression of our dear affection to him! Yea, how heartily ashamed would we be for our uncivil and unbecoming behaviour towards him, though occasioned by our ignorance of him! Truly, thus it is here; so long as faith's eye hath a mist before it, or is inactive, and as it were asleep in the dull habit, the Christian may sit very nigh Christ in an ordinance, in a providence, and be very little affected with him, and drawn out in loves to him. But when faith is awake to see him as he passeth by in his love and loveliness, and active to make report to the soul of the sweet excellences it sees in Christ, as also of his bleeding love to his soul; the Christian's love now cannot choose but spring and leap in his bosom at the voice of faith, as the babe did in Elizabeth's womb at the salutation of her cousin Mary.

Secondly, As faith sets the other graces on work, by actuating their objects, about which they are conversant; so faith helps them all to work by fetching strength from Christ to act and reinforce them. Faith is not only the instrument to receive the righteousness of Christ for our justification, but also it is the great instrument to receive grace from Christ for our sanctification. 'Of his fulness we receive, grace for grace,' John i. 16. But how do we receive it? Even by faith. Faith unites the soul to Christ; and as by a pipe laid close to the mouth of a fountain, water is carried to our houses for the supply of the whole family; so by faith is derived to the soul supply in abundance, for the particular offices of all the several graces. 'He that believes out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters,' John vii. 38. That is, he that hath faith, and is careful to live in the exercise of it, shall have a flow and increase of all other graces, called here 'living waters.' Hence it is, that the saints, when they would advance to a high pitch in other graces, pray for the increase of their faith. Our Saviour (Luke xvii. 3, 4,) set his apostles a very hard lesson, when he would wind up their love to such a high pitch, as to forgive their offending brother seven times in a day. Now mark, ver. 5: 'The apostles (apprehending the difficulty of the duty) said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.' But why did they not rather say, increase our love, seeing that was the grace they were to exercise in forgiving their brother? Surely it was because love hath its increase from faith; if they could get more faith on Christ, they might be sure they should have more love to their brother also. The more strongly they could believe on Christ for the pardon of their own sins, not seven, but seventy times in a day committed against God, the more easy it would be to forgive their brother offending themselves seven times in a day; which interpretation our Saviour's reply to their prayer for faith favours, ver. 6: 'And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say to this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, and it should obey you.' Where Christ shews the efficacy of justifying faith, by the power of a faith of miracles; as if he had said, you have hit on the right way to get a forgiving spirit. It is faith, indeed, that would enable you to conquer the unmercifulness of your hearts; though it were as deeply-rooted in you as this sycamore tree is in the ground, yet by faith you should be able to pluck it up. When we

Digitized by Google

would have the whole tree fruitful, we think we do enough to water the root, knowing what the root sucks from the earth, it would soon disperse into the branches. Thus, that sap and fatness, faith, which is the radical grace, draws from Christ, will be quickly diffused through the branches of the other graces, and tasted in the pleasantness of their fruit.

Thirdly, Faith defends the Christian in the exercise of all his graces. 'By faith we stand,' Rom. xi. 20; as a soldier, under the protection of a shield, stands his ground, and doth his duty, notwithstanding all the shots that are made against him, to drive him back. When faith fails, then every grace is put to the run and rout. Abraham's simplicity and sincerity, how was it put to disorder, when he dissembled with Abimelech concerning his wife? And why, but because his faith failed him? Job's patience received a wound when his hand grew weary, and his shield of faith, which should have covered him, hung down. Indeed no grace is safe, if from under the wing of faith; therefore to secure Peter from falling from all grace, Christ tells him, 'he had prayed that his faith should not fail,' Luke xxii. 32. This was the reserve that Christ took care should be kept, to recover his other graces, when foiled by the enemy, and to bring him off that encounter, wherein he was so sadly bruised and broken. It is said, that Christ could 'not do many mighty things in his own country because of their unbelief,' Matt. xiii. 58. Neither can Satan do any great hurt to the Christian, so long as faith is upon the place. It is true he aims to fight faith above all, as that which keeps him from coming at the rest, but he is not able long to stand before it. Let a saint be never so humble, patient, devout, alas! Satan will easily pick some hole or other in these graces, and break in upon him when he stands in the best array, if faith be not in the field to cover these. This is the grace that makes him face about, and take him to his heels, 1 Pet. v. 9.

Fourthly, Faith alone procures acceptance with God for all the other graces and their works. 'By faith Abel offered that excellent sacrifice,' to which God gave such a gracious testimony, Heb. xi. 4. When the Christian hath wrought hardest in a day, and hath spun the finest, evenest thread of obedience at the wheel of duty, he is afraid to carry home his work at night with an expectation of any acceptance at God's hands for his works' sake. No; it is faith he makes use of, to present it through Christ to God for acceptance. We are said, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;' that is, by faith in Christ; for without faith, Christ makes none of our sacrifices acceptable. God takes nothing kindly but what the hand of faith presents; and so prevalent is faith with God, that he will take light gold, broken services, at her hand; which, were they to come alone, would be rejected with indignation. As a favourite that hath the ear of his prince finds it easy to give his poor kindred entertainment at the court also; so Joseph brought his brethren into Pharaoh's presence with great demonstrations of favour shewn them by him for his sake. And Esther wooed Mordecai into a high preferment in Ahasuerus's court, who upon his own credit could get no further than to sit at the gate. Thus faith brings those works and duties into God's presence, which else were sure to be shut out; and pleading the righteousness of Christ, procures them to be received into such high favour with God, that they become his delight, Prov. xv. 8, and as a pleasant perfume in his nostrils, Mal. iii. 4.

Fifthly, Faith brings in succours, when other graces fail. Two ways the Christian's graces may fail; in their activity or in their evidence. First, In their activity. It is low water sometimes with the Christian. He cannot act so freely and vigorously then, as at another time when the tide runs high, through divine assistances that flow in upon him; those temptations which he could at one time snap asunder, as easy as Samson did his cords of flax, at another time he is sadly hampered with, that he cannot shake them off. Those duties which he performs with delight and joy, when his grace is in a healthful plight, at another time he pants at, as much as a sick man doth to go up a hill, so heavily doth he find them come off. Were not the Christian, think you, ill now on it, if he had no comings in, but from his own shop of duty? Here now is the excellency of faith, it succours the Christian in this his bankrupt condition. As Joseph got over his brethren to him, and nourished them out of his granaries all the time of famine, so doth faith the Christian in this

Digitized by Google

his penury of grace and duty. And this it doth two ways. First, By laying claim to the fulness of that grace which is in Christ as its own. Why art thou dejected, O my soul, saith the Christian's faith, for thy weak grace? There is enough in Christ, all fulness dwells in him; it pleased the Father it should be so, and that to pleasure thee in thy wants and weaknesses. It is a ministerial fulness; as the clouds carry rain, not for themselves, but the earth, so doth Christ his fulness of grace for thee. 'He is made of God to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,' 1 Cor. i. 30. When the rags of the Christian's own righteousness discourage and shame him, faith hath a robe to put on, that covers all this uncomeliness; Christ is my righteousness, saith faith, and 'in him we are complete,' Col. ii. 10. Faith hath two hands, a working hand, and a receiving hand; and the receiving hand relieves the working hand, or else there would be a poor house kept in the Christian's bosom. We find Paul himself but in a starving condition, for all the comfort his own graces could with their earnings afford him; he is a wretched man in his own account, if these be all he hath to live upon, Rom. vii. 24: yet, even then, when he sees nothing in his own cupboard, his faith puts forth its receiving hand to Christ, and he is presently set at a rich feast, for which you find him giving thanks, ver. 25: 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' Secondly, Faith succours the Christian in the weakness and inactivity of his graces, by applying the promises for the saint's perseverance in grace. It brings great comfort to a sick man, though very weak at present, to hear his physician tell him, that though he is low and feeble, yet there is no fear he will die. The present weakness of grace is sad, but the fear of falling quite away far sadder. Now faith, and only faith, can be the messenger to bring this good news to the soul, that it shall persevere. Sense and reason are quite posed and dunced here. It seems impossible to them, that such a bruised reed should bear up against all the counter-blasts of hell, because they consider only what grace itself can do, and finding it so over-matched by the power and policy of Satan, think it but rational to give the victory to the stronger side. But faith, when it sees symptoms of death in the saint's grace, finds life in the promise, and comforts the soul with this, that the faithful God will not suffer his grace to see corruption; he hath undertook the physicking of his saints, John xv. 2: 'Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' When Hazael came to inquire of Elisha for his sick master whether he should live or die, the prophet sent him with this answer back unto the king his master, 'Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die,' 2 Kings viii. 10. That is, he might certainly recover from his disease, but he should certainly die by the traitorous bloody hand of Hazael, his servant. Give me leave only to allude to this: when the Christian consults with his faith, and inquires of it, whether his weak grace will fail or hold out, die or live; faith's answer is, 'Thy weak grace may certainly die and fall away, but the Lord hath shewed me it shall live and persevere;' that is, in regard of its own weakness, and the mutability of man's nature, the Christian's grace might certainly die and come to nothing; but God hath shewn faith in the promise, that it shall certainly live, and recover out of its lowest weakness. What David said in regard of his house, that every Christian may say in regard of his grace. Though his grace be not so with God, so strong, so unchangeable in itself; 'yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and my desire.' 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. This salt of the covenant is it that shall keep, saith faith, thy weak grace from corruption. 'Why art thou cast down,' saith the psalmist, 'O my soul? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God,' Psa. xlii. 11. The health of David's countenance was not in his countenance, but in his God, and this makes his faith silence his fears, and so peremptorily resolve upon it, that there is a time coming (how near soever he now lies to the grave's mouth) when he shall yet praise him. The health and life of thy grace lie both of them, not in thy grace, saith faith, but in God, who is thy God, therefore I shall yet live and praise him. I do not wonder that the weak Christian is melancholy and sad, when he sees his sickly face in any other glass than this.

Secondly, The Christian's grace may fail in the evidence of it. It may

Digitized by Google

disappear, as stars do in a cloudy night. How often do we hear the Christian say in an hour of desertion and temptation, I know not whether I love God or not in sincerity. I dare not say I have any true godly sorrow for sin. Indeed, I have thought formerly these graces had a being in me; but now I am at a loss what to think, yea, sometimes I am ready to fear the worst! Now, in this dark, benighted state, faith under-girds the soul's ship, and hath two anchors it casts forth, whereby the soul is stayed from being driven upon the devouring quicksands of despair and horror. First, Faith makes a discovery of the rich mercy in Christ to poor sinners, and calls the soul to look to it, when it hath lost the sight of his own grace. It is no small comfort to a man that hath lost his receipt for a debt paid, when he remembers that the man he deals with is a good and just man, though his discharge is not presently to be found. That God whom thou hast to deal with is very gracious; what thou hast lost, he is ready to restore (the evidence of thy grace I mean.) David begged this, and obtained it, Psa. li. Yea, saith faith, if it were true what thou fearest, that thy grace was never true, there is mercy enough in God's heart to pardon all thy former hypocrisy, if thou comest in the sincerity of thy heart; and so faith persuades the soul by an act of adventure to cast itself upon God in Christ: Wilt not thou, saith faith, expect to find as much mercy at God's hands, as thou canst look for at a man's? it is not beyond the line of created mercy, to forgive many unkindnesses, much falseness and unfaithfulness, upon an humble, sincere acknowledgment of the same. The world is not so bad, but it abounds with parents that can do thus much for their children, and masters for their servants: and is that hard for God to do, which is so easy in his creature? Thus faith vindicates God's name. And so long as we have not lost the sight of God's merciful heart, our head will be kept above water, though we want the evidence of our own grace. Secondly, Faith goes further; when the Christian cannot see this grace or that in his own bosom, then faith makes a discovery of them in the promise, where they may be had. And it is some comfort, though a man hath no bread in his cupboard, to hear there is some to be had in the market. O, saith the complaining Christian, there were some hope, if I could find but those relentings and meltings of soul which others have in their bosoms for sin; then I could run under the shadow of that promise, and take comfort, 'Blessed are they which mourn, for they shall be comforted,' Matt. v.; but, alas! my heart is as hard as the flint. Well, saith faith, for thy comfort know, there are not only promises to the mourning soul and broken heart, but there are promises, that God will break the heart, and give 'a spirit of mourning.' So for other graces, not only promises to those that fear God, but 'to put the fear of God into our hearts;' not only promises to those that walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments, but also 'to put his Spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes,' Ezek. xxxvi. 27. Why, then, O my soul, dost thou sit here bemoaning thyself fruitlessly, for what thou sayest thou hast not, when thou knowest where thou mayest have it for going? As Jacob said to his sons, 'Why do ye look one upon another? behold, I have heard there is corn in Egypt; get you down thither, and buy for us from thence, that we may live, and not die,' Gen. xlii. 1, 2. Thus faith rouseth the Christian out of his amazed thoughts, upon which his troubled spirit dwells like one destitute of counsel, not knowing what to do; and turns his fruitless complaints, wherein he must necessarily repine and starve, into fervent prayer for the grace he wants. There is bread in the promise, saith faith; sit not here languishing in sluggish despondency, but get you down upon your knees, and humbly, but valiantly, besiege the throne of grace, for grace in this time of need. And certainly the Christian may sooner get a new evidence for his grace by pleading the promise, and plying the throne of grace, than by yielding so far to his unbelieving thoughts, as to sit down and melt away his strength and time in the bitterness of his spirit, which Satan dearly likes, without using the means, which he will never do to any purpose till faith brings thus much encouragement from the promise, that what he wants is there to be had freely and fully.

SECTION V.—Fifthly, As faith succours the Christian when his other graces fail him most, so it brings in his comfort when they most abound. Faith is to the Christian as Nehemiah was to Artaxerxes, Neh. ii. 1. Of all the graces this is the Christian's cup-bearer. The Christian takes the wine of joy out of

Digitized by Google

faith's hand rather than any other grace: Rom. xv. 13, 'The God of peace fill you with all joy in believing.' It is observable, 1 Pet. i., to see how the apostle there doth as it were cross his hands, as once Jacob did in blessing his son Joseph's children, and gives the pre-eminence to faith, attributing the Christian's joy to his faith rather than to his love, ver. 8, 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.' Mark, 'believing, ye rejoice;' here is the door the Christian's chief joy, yea, all his fiduciary joy comes in at. It is Christ that we are in this respect allowed only to rejoice in: Phil. iii. 3, 'For we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh;' where Christ is made the sole subject of our rejoicing fiduciarily, in opposition to all else, even our graces themselves, which become flesh when thus rejoiced and gloried in. Christ's blood is the wine that only glads the heart of God by way of satisfaction to his justice, and therefore only that can bring true gladness into the heart of man. When Christ promiseth the Comforter, he tells his disciples from what vessel he should draw the wine of joy that he was to give them: John xvi. 15, 'He shall take of mine, and shall shew it you.' No grape of our own vine is pressed into this sweet cup; as if Christ had said, When he comes to comfort you with the pardon of your sins, he shall take of mine, not anything of yours: my blood, by which I purchased your peace with God; not your own tears of repentance, by which you have mourned for your sins. All the blessed privileges which believers are instated into, they are the fruits of Christ's purchase, not of our earnings. Now the Christian's joy flowing in from Christ, and not anything that the poor creature doth or hath; hence it comes to pass that faith, above all the graces, brings in the Christian's joy and comfort, because this is the grace that improves Christ, and what is Christ's, for the soul's advantage. As of grace, so of comfort. Faith is the good spy that makes discovery of the excellences in Christ, and then makes report of all to the soul it sees in him and knows of him. It is faith that broacheth the promises, turns the cock, and lets them run into the soul. It not only shews the soul how excellent Christ is, and what dainties are in the promises, but it applies Christ to the soul and carves out the sweet viands that are dished forth in the promises; yea, it puts them into the very mouth of the soul; it misticates and blinds the promise so, that the Christian is filled with its strength and sweetness. Till faith comes and brings news of the soul's welcome, O how maidenly and uncomfortably do poor creatures sit at the table of the promise! Like Hannah, 'they weep and eat not:' no alas! they dare not be so bold; but when faith comes, then the soul falls to, and makes a satisfying meal indeed. No dish on the table but faith will taste of. Faith knows God sets them not on to go off untouched. It is, though an humble, yet a bold grace, because it knows it cannot be so bold with God in his own way as it is welcome.

CHAPTER III.

SHEWETH UNBELIEF TO HAVE THE PRECEDENCY AMONG SINS, AS FAITH AMONG GRACES.

Use 1. Is faith the chief of graces! This may help us to conceive of the horrible nature of unbelief. This surely will deserve as high a place among sins, as faith among graces. Unbelief is the Beelzebub, the prince of sins. As faith is the radical grace, so is unbelief a radical sin, a sinning sin. As, of all sinners, those are most infamous who are ringleaders and make others sin, (which is the brand that God hath set upon Jeroboam's name,—'Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who sinned and made Israel, to sin,' 1 Kings xiv. 16,) so among sins they are most horrid that are most productive of other sins: such a one is unbelief above any other; it is a ringleading sin, a sin-making sin. The first poisonous breath which Eve sucked in from the temper was sent in these words, 'Yea,' hath God said, 'ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' Gen. iii. 1; as if he had said, Consider well upon the matter; do you believe God meant so? can you think so ill of God as to believe he would keep the best fruit of the whole garden from you? This was the traitor's gate at which all other sins entered into her heart; and it continues to this day of the same

Digitized by Google

use to Satan for the hurrying souls into other sins, called therefore 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from God,' Heb. iii. 12. The devil sets up this sin of unbelief, as a blind betwixt the sinner and God, that the shot which come from the threatening, and are levelled at the sinner's breast, may not be dreaded and feared by him; and then the wretch can be as bold with his lust as the pioneer is at his work, when once he hath got his basket of earth between him and the enemy's bullets. Nay, this unbelief doth not only choke the bullets of wrath which are sent out of the law's fiery mouth, but it damps the motions of grace which come from the gospel: all the offers of love which God makes to an unbelieving heart, they fall like seed into dead earth, or like sparks into a river, they are out as soon as they fall into it. 'The word,' it is said, Heb. iv. 2, 'did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' The strength of the whole body of sin lies in this lock of unbelief. There is no mastering of a sinner while unbelief is in power: this will carry all arguments away, whether they be from law or gospel, that are pressed upon him, as easily as Samson did the doors, posts, with bar and all, from the city Gaza, Judges xvi. 2. It is a sin that doth keep the field one of the last of all others, that which the sinner is last convinced of, and the saint ordinarily last conqueror of; it is one of the chief strengths and fastnesses unto which the devil retreats when other sins are routed. O how often do we hear a poor sinner confess and bewail other sins he hath lived in formerly with brinish tears, but will not hearken yet to the offer of mercy in Christ! Bid him believe on Christ, and he shall be saved, (which was the doctrine Paul and Silas preached to the trembling jailor, Acts xvi. 31,) alas! he dares not, he will not; you can hardly persuade him it is his duty to do so. The devil hath now betaken himself to this city of gates and bars, where he stands upon his guard; and the more strongly to fortify himself in it, he hath the most specious pretences for it of any other sin. It is a sin that he makes the humbled soul commit out of a fear of sinning, and so stabs the good name of God for fear of dishonouring him by a saucy, presumptuous faith. Indeed it is a sin by which Satan intends to put the greatest scorn upon God, and unfold all his cankered malice against him at once. It is by faith that the saints 'have all obtained a good report;' yea, it is by the saints' faith that God hath a good report in the world; and by unbelief the devil doth his worst to raise an evil report of God in the world; as if he were not what his own promise and his saints' faith witness him to be. In a word, it is a sin that hell gapes for of all others. There are two sins that claim a pre-eminence in hell,—hypocrisy and unbelief; and therefore other sinners are threatened 'to have their portion with hypocrites,' Matt. xxiv. 5, and 'with unbelievers,' Luke xii. 46; as if those infernal mansions were taken up principally for these, and all others were but inferior prisoners. But of the two, unbelief is the greatest and that which may with an emphasis be called, above this or any other, 'the damning sin.' 'He that believes not is condemned already,' John iii. 18. He hath his mittimus already to jail; yea, he is in it already in a sense: he hath the brand of a damned person on him. The Jews are said, Rom. xi. 32, 'to be shut up in unbelief.' A surer prison the devil cannot keep a sinner in. Faith shuts the soul up in the promise of life and happiness, as God shut Noah into the ark. It is said, Gen. vii. 16, 'The Lord shut him in:' thus faith shuts the soul up in Christ and the ark of his covenant, from all fear of danger from heaven or hell; and, on the contrary, unbelief shuts a soul up in guilt and wrath, that there is no more possibility of escaping damnation for an unbeliever, than for one to escape burning, that is shut up in a fiery oven. No help can come to the sinner, so long as this bolt of unbelief is on the door of his heart. As our salvation is attributed to faith rather than to other graces, though none were wanting in a saved person; so sinners' damnation and ruin is attributed to their unbelief, though other sins were found with it in the person damned. The Spirit of God passeth over the Jews' hypocrisy, murmuring, rebellion, and lays their destruction at the door of this one sin of unbelief, Heb. iii. 19: 'They could not enter in because of unbelief.' O sinners, (you who live under the gospel I mean,) if you perish, know beforehand what is your undoing; it is your unbelief that does it. If a malefactor that is condemned to die be offered his life by the judge, upon reading a psalm of mercy, and he reads it not, we may say his not reading hangs him. The

Digitized by Google

promise of the gospel is this psalm of mercy, which God offers in his Son to law-condemned sinners; believing is reading this psalm of mercy: if thou believest not, and art damned, thou goest to hell rather for thy final unbelief, than any of thy other sins, for which a discharge is offered thee upon thy receiving Christ, and believing on him. Let this cause us all to rise up against this sin, as the Philistines did against Samson, whom they called the destroyer of their country, Judg. xvi. 24. This is the destroyer of your souls, and that is worse: yea, it destroys them with a bloodier hand than other sins do, that are not aggravated with this. We find two general heads of indictments, upon which the whole world of sinners shall be condemned at the great day, 2 Thess. i. 8, where Christ's coming to judgment is expressed; and those miserable, undone creatures, that shall fall under his condemning sentence, they are comprised in these two; such as 'know not God,' and such as 'obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.' The heathens' negative unbelief of the gospel shall not be charged upon them, because they never had it preached to them. No, they shall be sent to hell for 'not knowing God,' and so shall escape with a lighter damnation by far, than Jews or Christian Gentiles, to whom the gospel hath been preached, though to some of these with a stronger and longer continued beam of light than others. The dismal charge which shall be brought against these will be, that they have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus; that is, not believed on Christ, called therefore 'the obedience of faith,' Rom. xvi. 26. And certainly we cannot but think, that there shall be a torment proper to these gospel-refusers which those that never had the offer of grace shall not feel in hell. And among those that obey not the gospel, the greatest vengeance waits for them that have had the longest and most passionate treaty of mercy allowed them. These are they who put God to the greatest expense of mercy, and therefore must necessarily expect the greatest proportion of wrath and vengeance to be measured to them; yea, their unbelief puts Christ and the grace of God in him to the greatest shame and scorn that is possible for creatures to do; and it is but righteous that God should therefore put their unbelief and themselves with it to the greatest shame before men and angels of any other sinners.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME ARGUMENTS TO MAKE US SERIOUS IN THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH, WITH ONE DIRECTION TAKEN FROM THE MANNER OF THE SPIRIT'S WORKING FAITH.

Use 2. Is faith the chief of graces? Let this make us the more curious and careful, that we be not deceived in our faith. There are some things of so inconsiderable worth, that they will not pay us for the pains and care we take about them; and there to be choice and scrupulous, is folly; to be negligent and incurious, wisdom. But there are other things of such worth, and weighty consequence, that none but he that means to call his wisdom in question can be willing to be mistaken or cozened in. Who that is wise would pay as for a precious stone, and have a pebble, or at best a Bristol stone, put upon him for his money? Who, when his life is at stake, and knows no way to save it, but by getting some one rich drug which is very scarce, but to be had, would not be very careful to have the right? O my dear friends, doth it not infinitely more concern you to be careful in your merchandize for this pearl of precious faith? Can you be willing to take the devil's false sophisticated ware off his hand,—a mock-faith with which he would cheat you, rather than obtain the faith unfeigned, which God hath to give unto his children; called therefore 'the faith of God's elect?' Will the devil's dregs, that are sure to kill thee, serve thy turn, when thou art offered by God himself a rich drug that will cure thee? When thou goest to buy a garment, thou askest for the best piece of stuff or cloth in the shop; in the market thou wouldst have the best meat for thy belly; when with the lawyer, the best counsel for thy estate; and of the physician, the best directions for thy health. Art thou for the best in all, but for thy soul? Wouldst thou not have a faith of the best kind also? If a man receives false money, who doth he wrong but himself? and if thou art gulled with a false faith, the loss is thy own, and that no small one; thyself will think so when thou comest to the bar, and God shall bid thee either pay the debt thou owest him, or go to rot and roar in hell's prison. Then, how wilt thou be

Digitized by Google

confounded when thou producest thy faith, and hopest to save thyself with this, that thou believest on the Lord Jesus, but shalt have thy confidence rejected, and God tell thee to thy teeth, it is not faith, but a lie in thy right hand that thou hast got; and therefore he will not accept the payment, though it be Christ himself thou offerest to lay down; nay, that he will give thee up into the tormenter's hand, and that not only for not believing, but also for counterfeiting the King of heaven's coin, and setting his name on thy false money; which thou dost by pretending to faith, when it is a false one thou hast in thy bosom. This were enough to awaken your care in the trial of your faith; but to give some further weight to the exhortation, we shall cast in these three considerations.

SECTION I.—First, As thy faith is, so are all thy other graces. As a man's marriage is, so are all his children, legitimate, or illegitimate. Thus, as our marriage is to Christ, so all our graces. Now, it is faith by which we are married to Christ. 'I have espoused you to one husband,' saith Paul to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. xi. 2. How, but by their faith? It is faith whereby the soul gives its consent to take Christ for her husband. Now, if our faith be false, then our marriage to Christ is feigned; and if that be feigned, then all our pretended graces are base-born, how goodly an outside soever they have (as a bastard may have a fair face), they are illegitimate; our humility, patience, temperance, all bastards; and you know, 'a bastard was not to enter into the congregation,' Deut. xxiii. 2. No more shall any bastard grace enter into the congregation of the just in heaven. He that hath children of his own will not make another's bastard his heir. God hath children of his own, to inherit heaven's glory, in whose hearts he hath by his own Spirit begotten those heavenly graces which do truly resemble his own holy nature; surely he will never settle it upon strangers, counterfeit believers, that are the devil's brats and bye-blows.

Secondly, Consider, the excellency of true faith makes false faith so much the more odious. Because a king's son is an extraordinary personage, therefore it is so high a crime for an ignoble person to counterfeit himself to be such a one. It is by faith that we become the sons of God, John i. 12. And what a high presumption is it then, that by a false faith thou commitest? Thou pretendest thyself to be a child of God, when no heaven-blood runs in thy veins, but hast more reason to look for thy kindred in hell, and derive thy pedigree from Satan; this passeth for no less than blasphemy in the account of the Scripture, Rev. ii. 9: 'I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.' God loathes such with his heart. A false friend is worse than an open enemy in man's judgment; and a hypocritical Judas more abhorred by God than a bloody Pilate; either, therefore, get true faith, or pretend to none. The ape, because he hath the face of a man, but not the soul of a man, is therefore the most ridiculous of all creatures: and of all sinners, none will be put more to shame at the last day than such as have aped and imitated the believer in some exterior postures of profession, but never had the spirit of a believer, so as to perform one vital act of faith. The psalmist tells us of some, 'whose image God will despise,' Psa. lxxiii. 20. It is spoken chiefly of the wicked man's temporary prosperity, which, for its short continuance, is compared to the image or representation of a thing in the fancy of a sleeping man that then is busy, and pleaseth us with many fine pleasing objects, but all are lost when our sleep leaves us. This God will despise at the great day, when he shall not give heaven and glory by the estates and honours that men had in the world, but tumble them down to hell, if graceless, as well as the poorest beggar in the world. But, there is another sort of persons, whose image God will at that day despise more than these, and that is, the image of all temporary believers and unsound professors, who have a fantastical faith, which they set up like an image in their imaginations, and dance about with as many self-pleasing thoughts as a man doth that is dreaming himself to be some great prince; but this great idol shall then be broken, and the worshippers of it hissed down to hell with greater shame than any other.

Thirdly, None stand at greater disadvantage for the obtaining a true faith, than he who flatters himself with a false one. 'Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him, Prov. xxvi. 12; that is,

Digitized by Google

there is more hope of persuading him: of all fools, the conceited fool is the worst. Pride makes a man incapable of receiving counsel. Nebuchadnezzar's mind is said to be hardened in pride, Dan. v. 20. There is no reasoning with a proud man; he castles himself in his own opinion of himself, and there stands upon his defence against all arguments that are brought. Bid a conceited professor labour for faith, or he is undone; and the man will tell you, that you mistake and knock at the wrong door; it is the ignorant person or profane you should go to on that errand. He thanks God he is not now to seek for a faith; and thus he blesseth himself in his good condition, when, God knows, 'he feeds on ashes,' but 'a deceived heart hath so turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his own soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?' Isa. xliv. 20. The ignorant, profane person, like the psalmist's man of low degree, is plain vanity. It is not hard to make themselves to acknowledge as much, that they have nothing, deserve nothing, can look for nothing, as they are but hell and damnation: but such as pretend to faith, and content themselves with a false one, they are, like the men of high degree, a lie, which is vanity as well as the other, but with a specious cover over it, that hides it; therefore the devil is forward enough to put poor silly souls on believing, that he may forestall, if he can, the Spirit's market, and prevent the creature's obtaining of a true faith, by cheating of it with a counterfeit, like Jeroboam's wicked policy, who, to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem, and hankering after the true worship of God there, set up something like a religious worship nearer hand at home in the golden calves; and this pleased many well enough, that they missed not their walk to Jerusalem. O friends take heed therefore of being cheated with a false faith. Every one, I know, would have the living child to be hers, and not the dead one. We would all pass for such as have the true faith, and not the false; but be not your own judges, appeal to the Spirit of God, and let him with the sword of his word come and decide the controversy, which faith is thine, the true or false.

SECTION II.—Secondly, By this time possibly you may be solicitous to know what your faith is, and how you may come to judge of the truth of it. Now for your help therein, take these two directions: one taken from the manner of the Spirit's working faith, the other taken from the properties of faith when it is wrought. First, From the manner of the Spirit's working faith in the soul. It is incomparably the greatest work that passeth upon the soul from the Spirit of Christ; it is called, 'the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,' Eph. i. 19. O, observe with what a heap of expressions the Spirit of God loads our weak understanding, that, labouring under the weight of them, and finding the difficulty of reaching the signification of them, we might be the more widened, to conceive of that power which can never be fully understood by us—(being indeed infinite, and so too big to be inclosed within the narrow walls of our understanding)—power, greatness of power, exceeding greatness, and, lastly, exceeding greatness of his power, that is, of God. What angel in heaven can tell us what all these amount to? God (with reverence be it spoken) sets his whole force to this work. It is compared to no less than 'the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power,' &c., ver. 20, 21. To raise any one from the dead, is a mighty, an almighty work; but to raise Christ from the dead, carries more wonder with it than to raise any other: he had a heavier gravestone to keep him down than any besides, the weight of a world's sin lay upon him; yet notwithstanding this, he is raised with power by the Spirit, not only out of the grave, but into glory. Now the power God puts forth upon the soul in working faith, is according to this of raising Christ, for indeed the sinner's soul is as really dead in sin, as Christ's body was in the grave for sin. Now speak, poor creature, art thou any way acquainted with such a power of God to have been at work in thee? Or dost thou think slightly of believing, and so show thyself a stranger to this mystery? Certainly this one thing might resolve many (if they desired to know their own state) that they have no faith, because they make faith so trivial and light a matter, as if it were as easy to believe, as to say they do; and it were of no more difficulty to receive Christ into their souls by faith, than to put a bit of bread into their mouths with their hand.

Digitized by Google

Ask some, whether ever such a day or time of God's power came over their heads, to humble them for sin, drive them out of themselves, and draw them effectually unto Christ; and they may answer you as those did Paul, when he asked whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed; they said unto him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost,' Acts xix. 2. So these might say, We know not whether there be any such power required to the working of faith or no.

But to descend into a more particular consideration of this powerful work of the Spirit upon the soul for the production of faith; to which it will be necessary to consider what posture the Spirit of Christ finds the soul in before he begins this great work; and then how he makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon the soul for the working faith. First, For the posture of the soul. The Spirit finds the creature in such a state, as it neither can nor will contribute the least help to the work. As the prince of the world, when he came to tempt Christ, found nothing in him to befriend and further his tempting design; so when the Spirit of Christ comes, he finds as little encouragement from the sinner; no party within the castle of the soul to side with him, when he comes first to set down before it, and lay siege to it; but all the powers of the whole man in arms against him. Hence it is that so many scornful answers are sent out to the summons that are given sinners to yield. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not,' John i. 11. Never was any garrison more resolved to stand out against both the treaties and batteries of an assailing enemy, than the carnal heart is against all means that God useth to reduce it into his obedience. The noblest operations of the soul are 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' James iii. 15. So that, except heaven and earth can meet; sensual and spiritual please one palate; God and the devil agree; there is no hope that a sinner of himself should like the motion Christ makes, or that with any argument he should be won over to like it, so long as the ground of dislike remains in his earthly, sensual, and devilish nature. Secondly, We proceed to shew how the Spirit makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon it for the working faith. Now the Spirit's address is suited to the several faculties of the soul; the principal of which are these three: understanding, conscience, and will; these are like three forts, one within the other, which must all be reduced before the town be taken: the sinner, I mean, subdued to the obedience of faith. And to these the Spirit makes his particular addresses, putting forth an act of almighty power upon every one of them, and that in this order. First, The Spirit makes his approach to the understanding, and on it he puts forth an act of illumination. The Spirit will not work in a dark shop; the first thing he doth in order to faith, is to beat out a window in the soul, and let in some light from heaven into it. Hence believers are said to be 'renewed in the spirit of their minds,' Eph. iv. 23; which the same apostle calleth, being renewed in knowledge, Col. iii. 10. By nature we know little of God, and nothing of Christ, or the way of salvation by him. The eye of the creature therefore must be opened to see the way of life, before he can by faith get into it. God doth not use to waft souls to heaven like passengers in a ship, who are shut under the hatches, and see nothing all the way they are sailing to their port; if so, that prayer might have been spared which the psalmist, inspired of God, breathes forth in the behalf of the blind Gentiles, Psa. lxvii. 2: 'That thy way may be known upon earth, and thy saving health among all nations.' As faith is not a naked assent, without affiance and innitency on Christ; so neither is it a blind assent, without some knowledge. If therefore thou continuest still in thy brutish ignorance, and knowest not so much as who Christ is, and what he hath done for the salvation of poor sinners, and what thou must do to get interest in him, thou art far enough from believing. If the day be not broke in thy soul, much less is the Sun of righteousness arisen by faith in thy soul.

Again, Secondly, When the Spirit of God hath sprung with a divine light into the understanding, then he makes his address to the conscience, and the act which passeth upon that is an act of conviction, John xvi. 8: 'He shall convince the world,' &c. Now this conviction is nothing but a reflection of the light that is in the understanding upon the conscience, whereby the creature feels the weight and force of those truths he knows, so as to be

Digitized by Google

brought into a deep sense of them. Light in a direct beam heats not, nor doth knowledge swimming in the brain affect. Most under the gospel know that unbelief is a damning sin, and that there is no name to be saved by but the name of Christ; yet how few of those know this convincingly, so as to apply this to their own consciences, and to be affected with their own deplorable state, who are the unbelievers and Christless persons! As he is a convicted drunkard in law, who, in open court, or before a lawful authority, upon clear testimony, and deposition of witnesses, is found and judged to be such: so he, scripturally, is a convinced sinner, who, upon the clear evidence of the word brought against him by the Spirit, is found by his own conscience (God's officer in his bosom) to be so: speak now, poor creature, did ever such an act of the Spirit of God pass upon thee as this is? which that thou mayest the better discern of, try thyself by these few characters of a convinced person.

First, A sinner truly convinced is not only convinced of this sin or that sin, but of the evil of all sin. It is an ill sign when a person seems in a passion to cry out of one sin, and to be senseless of another sin. A parboiled conscience is not right,—soft in one part and hard in another; the Spirit of God is uniform in its work. Secondly, The convinced sinner is not only convinced of acts of sin, but of the state of sin also. He is not only affected with what he hath done, this law broken, and that mercy abused, but with what his state and present condition is. Peter leads Simon Magus from that one horrid act he committed, to the consideration of that which was worse, the dismal state that he discovered him to be in: 'I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,' Acts viii. 23. Many will confess they do not do as they should, who will not think by any means so ill of themselves, that their state is naught, a state of sin and death; whereas the convinced soul freely puts himself under this sentence of death; owns his condition, and dissembles not his pedigree. 'I am a most vile wretch,' saith he, 'a limb of Satan, full of sin, as the toad is of rank poison; my whole nature lies in wickedness, even as the dead, rotten carcass doth in its slime and putrefaction. I am a child of wrath, born to no other inheritance than hell flames; and if God will now tread me down thither, I have not one righteous syllable to object against his proceedings, but there is that in my own conscience which will clear him from having done me any wrong in my doom.' Thirdly, The convinced sinner doth not only condemn himself for what he hath done and what he is, but he despairs of himself as to anything he can now do to save himself. Many, though they go so far as to confess they are vile wretches, and have lived wickedly, and for this deserve to die; yet when they have put the rope about their necks by a self-condemning act, they are so far from being convinced of their own impotency, that they hope to cut the rope with their repentance, reformation, and I know not what bundle of good works, which they think shall redeem their credit with God, and recover his favour, which their former sins have unhappily lost them. And this comes to pass, because the plough of conviction did not go deep enough to tear up those secret roots of self-confidence, with which the heart of every sinner is wofully tainted; whereas every soul thoroughly convinced by the Spirit is a self-despairing soul; he sees himself beyond his own help, like a poor condemned prisoner, laden with so many heavy irons, that he sees it impossible for him to make an escape with all his skill or strength out of the hands of justice. O friends, look whether the work be once gone thus far in your souls or not. Most that perish, it is not their disease that kills them, but their physician; they think to cure themselves, and this leaves them incurable. Speak, soul; did the Lord ever ferret thee out of this burrow, where so many earth themselves? Art thou as much at a loss what to do, as sensible of what thou hast done? Dost thou see hell in thy sin, and despair in thyself? Hath God got thee out of this Keilah, and convinced thee, if thou shouldst stay in the self-confidence of thy repentance, reformation, and duties, they would all deliver thee up into the hands of God's justice and wrath, when they shall come against thee? then, indeed, thou hast escaped one of the finest snares that the wit of hell can weave. Fourthly, The convinced sinner is not only convinced of sin, so as to condemn himself, and despair of himself, but he is convinced of a full provision laid up in Christ for self-condemned and self despairing ones, John xvi.: 'He shall convince the

Digitized by Google

world of sin,' ver. 9, 'and of righteousness,' ver. 10. And this is as necessary an antecedent to faith as any of the former. Without this, the soul convinced of sin is more like to go to the gallows with Judas, or fall on the sword of the law as the jailer attempted to do on his when he thought his condition desperate, than think of coming to Christ. Who will go to his door, that hath not wherewithal to relieve him?

The third and last faculty to be dealt with, is the will; and on this, for the production of faith, the Spirit puts forth an act of renovation, whereby he doth sweetly, but powerfully, incline the will, which before was rebellious and refractory, to accept of Christ, and make a free, deliberate choice of him, for his Lord and Saviour. I say a free choice, not cudgelled into him with apprehensions of wrath, as one may run under an enemy's penthouse in a storm, whose door he would have passed by in fair weather, and never have looked that way. Speak, soul, dost please thyself, in choosing Christ? dost go to Christ, not only for safety, but delight? So the spouse, 'I sat under his shadow with great delight,' Cant. ii. 3. I say a deliberate choice, wherein the soul well weighs the terms Christ is offered on, and when it hath considered all seriously, likes them, and closeth with him. Like Ruth, who when Naomi spake the worst she could to discourage her, yet liked her mother's company too well to lose it for those troubles that attended her. Speak, soul, hath the Spirit of God thus put his golden key into the lock of thy will, to open the everlasting door of thy heart to let Christ the King of glory in? Hath he not only opened the eye of thy understanding, as he awaked Peter asleep in prison, and caused the chains of senselessness and stupidity to fall off thy conscience, but also opened the iron gate of thy will to let thee out of the prison of impenitency, where even now thou were fast bolted in; yea, brought thee to knock at heaven's door for entertainment, as Peter did at the house of Mary, where the church was met? Be of good comfort; thou mayest know assuredly, that God hath sent not his angel, but his own Spirit, and hath delivered thee out of the hand of sin, Satan, and justice. We proceed to the trial of our faith from the properties of true faith; and we shall content ourselves with three.

CHAPTER V.

WHERE OUR FAITH IS PUT UPON TRIAL BY ITS OBEDIENCE, WITH SOME PARTICULAR CHARACTERS THAT FAITH'S OBEDIENCE IS STAMPED WITH.

First, This choice, excellent faith, it is obedential faith; that is, true faith on the promise, works obedience to the command. Abraham is famous for his obedience; no command, how difficult soever, came amiss to him. He is an obedient servant, indeed, that when he doth but hear his master knock with his foot, leaves all, and runs presently to know his master's will and pleasure. Such a servant had God in Abraham: 'Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot?' Isa. xli. 2. But what was the spring that set Abraham's obedience a-going? see for this, Heb. xi. 8: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place, which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out,' &c. As it is impossible to please God without faith, so it is impossible not to desire to please God with faith. It may well go for an idle faith that hath hands, but doth not work: feet, but doth not walk in the statutes of God. No sooner had Christ cured the woman in the gospel of her fever, but it is said, 'she rose and ministered unto them,' Matt. viii. 15. Thus, the believing soul stands up and ministers unto Christ, in gratitude and obedience. Faith is not lazy, it inclines not the soul to sleep, but work; it sends the creature not to bed, there to sleep away his time in ease and sloth, but into the field. The night of ignorance and unbelief, that was the creature's sleeping time; but when the Sun of righteousness ariseth, and it is day in the soul, then the creature riseth and goeth forth to his labour. The first words that break out of faith's lips are those of Saul, in his hour of conversion: 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts ix. 6. Faith turns the Jordan, and alters the whole course of a man. 'We were,' saith the apostle, 'foolish and disobedient,' Tit. iii. 3: but after the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared,' ver. 4, then the case was altered, as it follows. And therefore take your foul fingers off the promise, and pretend

Digitized by Google

no more to faith, if ye be children of Belial, such whose necks do not freely stoop to this yoke of obedience. The devil himself may as soon pass for a believer as a disobedient soul. Other things he can shew, as much as you. Dost thou pretend to knowledge? thou wilt not deny the devil to be a greater scholar than thyself, I hope, and that in Scripture knowledge. Dost thou believe the Scripture to be true? and doth not he more strongly? Dost thou tremble? he much more. It is obedience he wants, and this makes him a devil, and it will make thee like him also.

Quest. But you may ask, What stamp is there to be found on faith's obedience, which will distinguish it from all counterfeits? for there are many fair semblances of obedience which the devil will never grudge us the having. *Ans.* Take these two characters of the obedience of faith.

First, Faith's obedience begins at the heart, and from thence it diffuseth and dilates itself to the outward man, till it overspreads the whole man in a sincere endeavour. As in natural life, the first part that lives is the heart, so the first that faith subdues into obedience is the heart. It is called a 'faith which purifieth the heart,' Acts xv. 9. And the believing Romans 'obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered to them,' Romans vi. 17. Whereas a false faith, which apes this true faith, as art imitates nature, begins without, and there ends. All the seeming good works of a counterfeit believer, they are like the beautiful colour in a picture's face, which comes not from a principle of life within, but the painter's pencil without. Such were those, John ii. 23, who are said 'to believe on Christ.' But 'Christ did not commit himself to them,' verse 24; and why? see verse 25, 'for he knew what was in man;' he cared not for the painted porch and goodly outside; he knew what was in man, and by that knowledge he knew them to be rotten at core, naught at heart, before they were specked on the skin of their exterior conversation.

Quest. But how may I know my obedience is the obedience of the heart?—*Ans.* If it comes from love, then if is the obedience of the heart. He commands the heart that is master of its love. The castle must needs yield when he that keeps it, and hath the keys of it, submits. Love is the affection that governs this royal fort of man's heart: we give our hearts to them we give our love. And indeed thus it is that faith brings the heart over into subjection and obedience to God, by putting it under a law of love, Gal. v. 6: 'faith which worketh by love.' First, faith worketh love, and then it worketh by it. As first the workman sets an edge on his tools, and then he carves and cuts with them, so faith sharpens the soul's love to God, and then acts by it; or as a statuary, to make some difficult piece, before he goes about it, finding his hands numbed with cold, that he cannot handle his tools so nimbly as he should, goes first to the fire, and with the help of its heat chafes them, till they, which were stiff and numbed, become agile and active, then to work he falls; so faith brings the soul, awake and listless enough, God knows, to any duty, unto the meditation of the peerless, matchless love of God in Christ to it, and at this fire faith stays the Christian's thoughts till his affections begin to kindle, and come to some sense of his love of God, and now the Christian bestirs himself for God with might and main.

Quest. 2. But how may I know my obedience is from love?—*Ans.* I refer you to St. John to be resolved of this question 1st epist. v. 3: 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.' Speek, soul, what account you of the commandments? Do you look upon them as an iron chain about your legs, and think yourselves prisoners because you are tied to them? Or do you value them as a chain of gold about your neck, and esteem yourselves favourites of the King of heaven, that he will honour you, to honour him by serving of him? So did as great a prince as the world had: 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly?' 1 Chron. xxix. Not, Who am I, that I should be a king over my people? but, that I should have a heart so gracious to offer willingly with my people? not, Who am I, that they should serve me? but, that thou wilt honour me with a heart to serve thee with them? The same holy man, in another place, speaks of sin as his prison, and his obedience as his liberty: 'I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts,' Psa. cxix. 45. When God gives him a large heart for duty, he is as thankful as a man that was bound in

Digitized by Google

prison is, when he is set at liberty, that he may visit his friends, and follow his calling. The only grievous thing to a loving soul is to be hindered in his obedience: this is that which makes such a one out of love with the world, and being in it, because it cumbers him in his work, and many times keeps him from it. As a conscionable, faithful servant, that is lame or sickly, and can do his master little service, O how it grieves him! Thus the loving soul bemoans itself, that it should put God to so much cost, and be so unprofitable under it. Speak, is this thy temper? Blessed art thou of the Lord! there is a jewel of two diamonds, which this wilt prove thou art owner of, that the crown jewels, of all the prices of the world, are not so worthy to be valued with, as a heap of dust or dung is to be compared with them. The jewel I mean is made of this pair of graces,—faith and love: they are thine, and with them God and all that he hath and is. But if the commandments of God be grievous (as they are to every carnal heart), and thou countest thyself at ease, when thou canst make an escape from a duty to commit a sin, as the beast doth, when his collar is off, and he in his fat pasture again, now thou art where thou wouldst be, and can shew some spirits that thou hast; but when conscience puts on the trace again, thou art dull and heavy again; O! it speaks thee to have no love to God, and therefore no faith on God that is true. That is a jade indeed who hath no metal but in the pasture.

Secondly, The obedience of faith is full of self-denial. Faith keeps the creature low in what he hath, as in what he doth. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' Gal. ii. 10. As if he had said, I pray, mistake me not; when I say, I live, I mean not that I live by myself, or of myself, but Christ in me. I live, and that deliciously; but it is Christ that keeps the house, not I. I mortify my corruptions, and vanquish temptations, but I am debtor to Christ for the strength. None can write here, as one did under Pope Adrian's statue, (where the place of his birth is named, and those princes that had preferred him from step to step, till he mounted the pope's chair, but God left out of all the story), *Nihil hic Deus fecit;* 'God did nothing for this man.' No Paul, and in him every believer, acknowledgeth God for sole founder and benefactor too, of all the good he hath and doth. They are not ashamed to acknowledge who they are beholden to for all. 'These are the children which God hath graciously given me,' said Jacob; and these the services which God hath graciously assisted me in, saith Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 10: 'I laboured more abundantly that they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me:' all is *ex dono Dei.* O how chary are saints of writing themselves authors of their own good works, parts, or abilities! 'Art thou able,' said the king to Daniel, 'to make known unto me the dream which I have seen?' Dan. ii. 26. Now mark, he doth not say as the proud astrologers, chap. ii. 4, 'We will shew the interpretation:' that fitted their mouths well enough who had no acquaintance with God, but not Daniel's, the servant of the living God: though at that very time he had the secret revealed to him, and could tell the kin his dream, yet he was careful to stand clear from any fitching of God's glory from him; and therefore he answers the king, by telling him what his God could do rather than himself: 'There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets,' &c. And what makes Daniel so self-denying? Truly it was because he had obtained this secret of God by faith at the throne of grace, as you may perceive by chap. ii., ver. 15, 16, 17, compared. That faith which taught him to beg the mercy of God, enabled him to deny himself, and give the entire glory of it from himself to God. As rivers empty their streams again into the bosom of the sea, whence they at first received them, so men give the praise of what they do unto that by which they do it. If they attempt any enterprise with their own wit, or industry, you shall have them bring their sacrifice to their wit or net. No wonder to hear Nebuchadnezzar, who looked no higher than himself in building his great Babylon, ascribe the honour of it to himself, Dan. iv. 30: 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' But faith teacheth the creature to blot out his own name, and write the name of God in its room upon all he hath and doth. When the servants, Luke xix. 16, came to give up their accounts to their lord, every one for his pound, those that were faithful to improve it, how humbly and self-denyingly do they speak! 'Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds,' saith the

Digitized by Google

first, ver. 16. 'Thy pound hath gained five,' saith another, ver. 18. Mark, not I have gained, but thy pound hath gained ten and five. They do not applaud themselves, but ascribe both principal and increase to God; thy talent hath gained: that is, thy gifts and grace, through thy assistance and blessing, have gained thus much more. Only he that did least comes in with a bag and tells his lord what he hath done: 'Behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.' Least doers are great boasters.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO PROPERTIES OF FAITH: IT IS PRAYERFUL, AND UNIFORM IN ITS ACTING.

SECONDLY, True faith is prayerful; prayer, it is the child of faith; and as the child bears his father's name upon him, so doth prayer the name of faith: what is it known by but by 'the prayer of faith?' James v. 15. Prayer, it is the very natural breath of faith; supplication and thanksgiving, the two parts of prayer; by these, as the body by the double motion of the lungs, doth the Christian suck in mercy from God, and breathe back again that mercy in praise to God; but without faith he could do neither; he could not by supplication draw mercy from God; for 'he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. xi. 6. Neither could he return praises to God without faith. David's heart must be fixed before he can sing and give thanks, Psa. lvi. Thanksgiving is an act of self-denial, and it is faith alone that will shew us the way out of our own doors; and as the creature cannot pray, I mean acceptably, without faith, so with faith he cannot but pray. The new creature (like our infants in their natural birth) comes crying into the world: and therefore Christ tells it for great news to Ananias of Saul, a new-born believer, 'Behold, he prays!' But is that so strange, that one brought up at the foot of Gamaliel, and so precise a Pharisee as he was, should be found upon his knees at prayer? Truly no, it was that his sect gloried in, their fasting and praying; and therefore, he being strict in this way, was no doubt acquainted with this work as to the exterior part of it; but he never had the spirit of prayer till he now had the spirit of grace, whereby he believed on Jesus Christ. And therefore, if you will try your faith, it must not be by bare praying, but by some peculiar characters which faith imprints prayer withal.

Now there are three acts by which faith discovers itself in reference to this duty of prayer. First, It puts forth such an exciting act, whereby it stirs up the Christian to pray. Secondly, An assisting act in prayer. Thirdly, A supporting act after prayer.

SECTION I.—First, Faith puts forth an exciting act, whereby it provokes the Christian, and strongly presseth him to pray. And this it doth, First, By discovering to the creature its own beggary and want, as also the fullness that is to be had from God in Christ for his supply; both which faith useth as powerful motives to quicken the soul to pray. As the lepers said to one another, 'Why sit we here until we die? if we say, we will enter into the city, there is famine to slay us; come, let us fall into the host of the Syrians,' 2 Kings vii. 3, 4; thus faith rouseth the soul up to prayer. If thou stayest at thy own door, O my soul, thou art sure to starve and die. What seest thou in thyself but hunger and famine? no bread there; no money to buy any in thy own purse: up, therefore, haste thee to thy God, and thy soul shall live. O are you pressed with this inward feeling of your own wants? press to the throne of grace as the only way left for your supply; you may hope it is faith that sends you; faith is the principle of our new life. 'I live,' saith Paul, 'by the faith of the Son of God,' Gal. ii. 20. This life, being weak, is craving and crying for nourishment, and that as naturally as the new-born babe doth for the milk; if, therefore, you find this inward sense prompting and provoking of you to cry to God, it shews this principle of life (faith I mean) is in thee.

Object. But may not an unbeliever pray in the sense of his wants, and be inwardly pinched with them, which may make him pray very feelingly?—*Ans.* We must distinguish of wants: they are either spiritual or carnal. It cannot be denied but an unbeliever may be very sensible of outward carnal wants, and knock loud at heaven's gate for a supply. We find them 'howling

Digitized by Google

on their beds, and assembling themselves for corn and wine,' Hosea vii. 14. There is the cry of the creature, and the cry of the new creature. Every creature hath a natural cry for that which suits their nature. Hence, Psalm cxiv. 7, 'The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat of God.' But give the lion flesh, and he will not roar for want of grass; give the ox grass, and you shall not hear him lowing for flesh; so give the faithless, graceless person his fill of his carnal food (sensual enjoyments), and you shall have little complaints of spiritual wants from him. They are therefore spiritual wants you must try your faith by: if thou canst heartily pray for love to Christ, faith on him, or any other grace, feeling the want of them as a hungry man doth of his food, thou mayest conclude safely there is this principle of new life, which, like the veins at the bottom of the stomach, by its sucking, puts thee to pain till it be heard and satisfied; for these graces being proper to the new creature, can be truly desired of none but one that is a new creature.

Secondly, Faith excites to prayer from an inward delight it hath in communion with God. 'It is good for me,' saith the psalmist, 'to draw near to God.' Now mark the next words: 'I have put my trust in the Lord,' Psa. lxxiii. 28. We take delight to be often looking where we have laid up our treasure. This holy man had laid up his soul and all he had in God by faith, to be kept safely for him; and now he delights oft to be with God; he hath that which invites him into his presence with sweet content. By faith the soul is contracted to Christ. Now, being espoused to Christ, there is no wonder at all that it should desire communion with him; and prayer being the place of meeting where Christ and the soul can come the nearest this side heaven, therefore the believer is seen so often walking that way. Canst thou say, poor soul, that this is thy errand when praying to see the face of God? Can nothing less, and needest thou nothing more, to satisfy and recreate thy soul in prayer, than communion with God? Certainly God hath thy faith, or else thou couldst not so freely bestow thy love on him, and take delight on him.

Section II.—Secondly, Faith puts forth an assisting act of prayer. To instance only in two particulars. First, It assists the soul with importunity. Faith is the wrestling grace; it comes up close to God, takes hold of God, and will not easily take a denial. It enfires all the affections, and sets them on work: this is the soul's eye, by which it sees the filth, the hell that is in every sin; and seeing affects the heart, and puts it into a passion of sorrow, when the soul spreads its abominations before the Lord. The creature now needs no onion to make it weep; tears come freely, as water from a flowing spring. It makes a discovery of Christ to the soul, in the excellences of his person, love, and graces, from the glass of the promise, at the sight of which it is even sick with longing after them; and such pangs of love come upon it, as to make it send forth strong cries and supplications for that it so impatiently desires; yea, further, faith doth not barely set the creature's teeth on edge by displaying the excellences of Christ and his grace, but it supplies him with arguments, and helps the soul to wield and use them both valiantly and victoriously upon the Almighty. Never could he tell what to do with a promise in prayer till now that faith teacheth him to press God with it, humbly, yet boldly. 'What wilt thou do unto thy great name?' saith believing Joshua, chap. vii. 9; as if he had said, Thou art so fast bound to thy people by promise and oath, that thou canst not leave them to perish but thy name will suffer with them. Faith melts promises into arguments, as the soldier doth lead into bullets, and then helps the Christian to send them with force to heaven in fervent prayer; whereas a promise in an unbeliever's mouth is like a shot in a gun's mouth, without any fire to put to it. O how cold and dead doth a promise drop from him in prayer! he speaks promises, but cannot pray promises, or press promises. And therefore try thyself, not by naked praying, but by importunity in prayer; and that not by the agitation of thy bodily spirits, but the inward working of thy soul and spirit, whether carried out to plead the promise, and urge it upon God with an humble importunity, or not. Secondly, Faith enables the soul to persevere in the work. False faith may shew some metal at hand, but it will jade at length: 'Will the hypocrite pray always?' Job xxvii. 10. No; as the wheel wears with turning, till it breaks at last, so doth the hypocrite; he prays himself weary of praying; something or other will in time make him quarrel with that

Digitized by Google

duty, which he never inwardly liked; whereas the sincere believer hath that in him which makes it impossible he should quite give over praying, except he should also cease believing: prayer is the very breath of faith; stop a man's breath, and where is he then? It is true, the believer, through his own negligence, may find more difficulty of fetching his praying breath at one time than at another (as a man in a cold doth for his natural breath); alas! who is so careful of his soul's health, that needs not bewail this? But for faith to live, and this breath of prayer to be quite cut off, is impossible. We see David did but hold his breath a little longer than ordinary, and what a distemper it put him into, till he gave himself ease again by venting his soul in prayer: 'I held my peace, and my sorrow stirred, my heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know my end,' Psa. xxxix. Dost thou, O man, find thyself under a necessity of praying, as the little babe who cannot choose but cry when it ails or wants anything, because it hath no other way to help itself than by crying, to hasten its mother or nurse to its help? The Christian's wants, sins, and temptations continuing to return upon him, he cannot but continue also to pray against them. 'From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee,' saith David, Psa. lxi. 2; wherever I am, I will find thee out; imprison me, banish me, or do with me what thou wilt, thou shalt never be rid of me; 'I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever,' ver. 4. But how could David do that, when banished from it? surely he means by prayer; the praying Christian carries a tabernacle with him. As long as David can come at the tabernacle, he will not neglect it; and when he cannot through sickness, banishment, &c., then he will look towards it, and as devoutly worship God in the open fields, as if he were in it. 'Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice,' Psa. cxli. 2; he speaks of such a time when he could not come to offer sacrifice at the tabernacle.

SECTION III.—Faith hath a supporting act after prayer. First, It supports the soul to expect a gracious answer: 'I will direct my prayers unto thee, and will look up,' Psa. v. 3; or, I will look; for what, but for a return? An unbelieving heart shoots at random, and never minds where his arrow lights, or what comes of his praying; but faith fills the soul with expectation. As a merchant, when he casts up his estate, he counts what he hath sent beyond sea, as well as what he hath in hand; so doth faith reckon upon what he hath sent to heaven in prayer and not received, as well as those mercies which he hath received, and are in hand at present. Now this expectation which faith raiseth in the soul after prayer, appears in the power that it hath to quiet and compose the soul in the interim between the sending forth, as I may say, the ship of prayer, and its return home with its rich lading it goes for; and it is more or less, according as faith's strength is. Sometimes faith comes from prayer in triumph, and cries, *Victoria.* It gives such a being and existance to the mercy prayed for in the Christian's soul, before any likelihood of it appears to sense and reason, that the Christian can silence all his troubled thoughts with the expectation of its coming. So Hannah prayed, 'and was no more sad,' 1 Sam. i. 18. Yea, it will make the Christian disburse his praises for the mercy long before it is received. Thus high faith wrought in David, Psa. lvi. 3, 4: 'At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee; and in the next words, ver. 4: 'In God will I praise his word;' that is, he would praise God for his promise, before there were any performance of it to him, when it had no existance but in God's faithfulness, and David's faith. This holy man had such a piercing eye of faith, as he could see the promise when he was at the lowest ebb of misery, so certain and unquestionable in the power and truth of God, that he could then praise God, as if the promised mercy had been actually fulfilled to him. But I would not have thee, Christian, try the truth of thy faith by this heroic high strain it mounts to in some eminent believers. Thou mayest be a faithful soldier to Christ, though thou attainest not to the degree of a few worthies in his army, more honourable in this respect than the rest of their brethren. There is a lower act of faith, which, if thou canst find may certify thee of its truth; that, I mean, which though it doth not presently disburden the soul (upon praying) of all its anxious, disquieting thoughts, yet, keeps the soul's head above the waves, and gives a check to them, that they abate, though by little and little,

Digitized by Google

as the stream in a channel doth at a falling tide. When God took the deluge from the earth, he did not do it in a moment; it is said, 'the waters returned from off the earth continually,' Gen. viii. 3; that is, it was falling water from day to day, till all was gone. Canst thou not find, Christian, that some of thy tumultuous disquieting thoughts are let out at the sluice of prayer, and that it is some ease to thy encumbered spirit, that thou hast the bosom of a gracious God to empty thy sorrowful heart into? And though praying doth not drain away all thy fears, yet it keeps thee, doth it not, from being overflown with them, which thou couldst not avoid without faith? A soul wholly void of faith, prays, and leaves none of its burden with God, but carries all back with it that it brought, and more too; calling on God gives no more relief to him than throwing out an anchor that hath no hooks to take hold on the firm earth doth the sinking ship. If, therefore, poor soul, thou findest upon throwing out thy anchor of faith in prayer, that it takes such hold on Christ in the promise, as to stay thee from being driven by the fury of Satan's affrighting temptations, or thy own despairing thoughts, bless God for it. The ship that rides at anchor is safe (though it may be a little tossed to and fro) so long as the anchor keeps its hold. And so art thou, poor soul; that faith will save from hell, that will not wholly free the soul here from fears.

SECTION IV.—Fourthly, True faith is uniform. As sincere obedience doth not pick and choose, take this commandment and leave that, but hath respect to all the precepts of God; so faith unfeigned hath respect to all the truths of God: it believes one promise as well as another. As the true Christian must not 'have the faith of our Lord Jesus with respect of persons,' James ii. 1, so not with respect to truths. To pretend to believe one promise, and to give no credit to another, this is to be partial in the promises, as the priests are charged to be in the duties of the law, Mal. ii. 9. The honour of God is as deeply engaged to perform one promise as another. Indeed, as the breach but of one commandment would put us under the guilt of the whole, so God's failing in one promise (which is blasphemy to think) would be the breaking of his whole covenant. Promises are copulative as well as commands; and therefore neither can God keep one, except he perform all; nor we believe one, except we believe all. God hath spoke all these words of promises, as he did those of precepts: his seal is to all, and he looks we should compass all within the embraces of our faith. David bears witness to the whole truth of God, Psa. cxix. 160: 'Thy word is true from the beginning, and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.' Try now thy faith here: possibly thou pretendest to believe the promise for pardon, and art often pleasing thyself with the thoughts of it; but what faith hast thou on the promise for sanctifying thy nature, and subduing thy corruptions? May be thou mindest not these, improvest not these; this fruit may hang long enough on branches of the promises, before thou gatherest it; the other is for thy tooth, not these: whereas true faith would like one as well as the other. See how heartily David prays for the performance of this promise, Psa. cxix. 132: 'Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name: order my steps in thy word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.' David would not lose any privilege that God hath by promise settled on his children: do with me, saith he, as thou usest to do. This is no more than family fare, what thou promisest to do for all that love thee; and let me not go worse clad than the rest of my brethren. May be thou fanciest thou hast a faith for the eternal salvation of thy soul; but hast thou faith to rely on God for the things of this life? A strange believer, is he not, that lives by faith or heaven, and by his wits and sinful policy for the world? Christ proves that they (John v. 44) did not believe on him, because they durst not trust him with their names and credits, if we cannot trust him with the less, how can we with the greater? I deny not, but he that hath a true faith, yea, a strong faith for heaven, may be put to a plunge, and his faith foiled about a temporal promise; but we must not from an hour of temptation, wherein God leaves his eminentest saints, to humble them, judge of the constant ordinary frame of the believer's heart. Though Abraham dissembled once to save his life, which he thought in some danger for his wife's beauty; yet he did at other times give eminent testimony that he trusted God for his temporal life, as well as for his eternal salvation. I do not

Digitized by Google

therefore bid thee question the truth of thy faith, for every fainting fit that comes over it, as to the good things of the promise for this life. A man may, in a time of war, have some of his estate lie under the enemy's power for a time, and he so long have no profits from it; but still he reckons it as his estate, is troubled for his present great loss, and endeavours as soon as he can to recover it again out of his enemy's hand; so in the hurry of a temptation, when Satan, the soul's great enemy, is abroad, and God withdraws his assistance, the believer may have little support from some particular promise; but the believer over counts that his portion, as well as any other, mourns he can act his faith no more upon it, and labours to reinforce his faith with new strength from heaven what he can, that he may be able to live upon it, and improve it more to his comfort; so that still it holds true, if we believe not God for this life; neither do we for the other. In a word, may be thou pretendest to a faith for thy temporals, and seemest to trust God for things of this life, but art a mere stranger to those prime acts of faith, whereby the believing soul closeth with Christ, and receiveth him as his Lord and Saviour, and so seals to the covenant that in the gospel is tendered to poor sinners. Canst thou so far fight against thy own reason as to think that any temporal promise belongs to thee without these? What gives the woman right to her jointure, but her marriage-covenant? And what gives the creature a true claim to these promises, or any other in the covenant of grace, but its union to Christ, and accepting of him as he is offered? The first act of God's love to the creature is that whereby he chooseth such a one to be his, and sets him apart in his unchangeable purpose, to be an object of his special love in Christ, and therefore called the foundation, as that on which God lays the superstructure of all other mercies. 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,' 2 Tim. ii. 19. First, God chooseth a person to be his, and on this foundation he builds, and bestows all his further cost of mercy upon the creature, as one that is his. So on the creature's part, first, faith closeth with Christ, severs him in his thoughts from all others, and chooseth him to be his Saviour, in whom alone he will trust, and whom alone he will serve; which done, then it trades with this promise and that, as the portion which falls to him by marriage with Christ. And therefore see how preposterous thy course is who snatchest these promises to thyself, before there hath passed any good-will from thee to Christ.

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXHORTATION TO ALL IN A STATE OF UNBELIEF, TO ENDEAVOUR FOR FAITH, WITH ONE DIRECTION TOWARD THE ATTAINING OF IT.

Use 3. Is faith so precious a grace? Let it provoke you, who want it, to get it. Can you hear of this pearl, and not wish it were yours? Wherefore hath the Spirit spoken such great and glorious things of faith in the word, but to make it the more desirable in your eyes? Is there any way to get Christ, but by getting faith? or dost thou not think that thou needest Christ as much as any other? There is a generation of men in the world, would almost make one think this was their judgment; who, because their corruptions have not, by breaking out into plague-sores of profaneness, left such a brand of ignominy upon their name as some others lie under, but their conversations have been strewed with some flowers of morality, whereby their names have kept sweet among their neighbours, therefore do they not at all listen to the offers of Christ, neither do their consciences much check them for this neglect. And why so? Surely it is not because they are more willing to go to hell than others, for they do that to escape it which many others will not; but because they think the way they are in will bring them in good time to heaven, without any more ado. Poor deluded creatures! is Christ then sent to help only some more debauched sinners to heaven, such as drunkards, swearers, and of that rank? And are civil, moral men, left to walk thither on their own legs? I am sure, if the word may be believed, we have the case resolved clear enough: that tells but of one way to heaven for all that mean to come there; as there is but 'one God,' so but 'one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus,' 1 Tim. ii. 5. And if but one bridge over the gulf, judge what is like to become of the civil, righteous man, for all his sweet-scented life, if he miss this one bridge, and

Digitized by Google

goes on in the road he hath set out in for heaven. O remember, proud man, who thou art, and cease thy vain attempt. Art not thou of Adam's seed? Hast not thou traitor's blood in thy veins? If 'every mouth be stopped,' Rom. iii. 19, 20, how darest thou open thine? If 'all the world is become guilty before God, that by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight,' where then shalt thou stand to plead thy innocency before him, who sees thy black skin under thy white feathers, thy foul heart through thy fair carriage? It is faith on Christ that alone can purify thy heart, without which thy washed face and hands (external righteousness I mean) will never commend thee to God. And therefore thou art under a horrible delusion, if thou dost not think that thou needest Christ, and a faith to interest thee in him, as much as the bloodiest murderer or filthiest Sodomite in the world. If a company of men and children in a journey were to wade through some brook, not beyond a man's depth, the men would have the advantage of the children; but if to cross the sea, the men would need a ship to waft them over, as well as the children; and they might well pass for a madman, if they should think to wade through without the help of a ship, that is offered them as well as the other, because they are a little taller than the rest are; such a foolish desperate adventure wouldst thou give for thy soul, if thou shouldst think to make thy way through the justice of God to heaven, without shipping thyself by faith in Christ, because thou art not so bad in thy external conversation as others. Let me therefore again and again beseech all that are yet destitute of faith, to endeavour for it, and that speedily. There is nothing deserves the precedency in your thoughts before this. David resolved 'not to give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids till he found out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob,' Psa. cxxxii. 4, 5. The habitation which pleaseth God most, is thy heart; but it must be a believing heart, Ephes. iii. 17: 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' O, how dare you sleep a night in that house where God doth not dwell? and he dwells not in thee, if thou carriest an unbelieving heart in thy bosom. There is never a gospel-sermon thou hearest, but he stands at thy door to be let in. Take heed of multiplying unkindnesses in denying him entertainment; how knowest thou but God may, finding thy heart so often shut by unbelief against his knocks, suddenly seal thee up under final unbelief.

Quest. But possibly thou wilt ask now, how thou mayest get this precious grace of faith?—*Ans.* The answer to this question takes in these following directions.

SECTION I.—First, Labour to get thy heart convinced of, and affected with, thy unbelief: till this be done, thou wilt be but sluggish and slighty in thy endeavours for faith. A man may be convinced of other sins, and never think of coming to Christ. Convince a drunkard of his drunkenness, and upon leaving his drunken trade his mind is pacified, yea, he blesseth himself in his reformation, because all the quarrel his conscience had with him was for that particular sin; but when the Spirit of God convinceth the creature of his unbelief, he gets between him and those burrows in which he did use to earth and hide himself; he hath no ease in his spirit from those plasters now which formerly have relieved him, and so kept him from coming over to Christ. Before, it served the turn to bring his conscience to sleep, when it accused him for such a sin, that he had left the practice of it, and for the neglect of a duty, that now he had taken it up, without any inquiry into his state whether good or bad, pardoned or unpardoned. Thus many make a shift to daub and patch the peace of their consciences, even as some do to keep up an old rotten house, by stopping in here a tile, and there a stone, till a loud wind comes and blows the whole house down. But when once the creature hath the load of its unbelief laid upon his spirit, then it is little ease to him to think he is no drunkard as he was, no athiest in his family, without the worship of God as he was. Thy present state, saith the Spirit of God, is as damning, in that thou art an unbeliever, as if thou wert these still; yea, what thou wert thou art, and will be found at the great day, to be the drunkard and atheist, for all thy seeming reformation, except by an intervening faith thou gainest a new name. What though thou art drunk no more, yet the guilt remains upon thee till faith strikes it off with the blood of Christ. God will be paid his debt by thee, or Christ for thee; and Christ pays no reckoning for unbelievers.

Digitized by Google

Again, as the guilt remains, so the power of those lusts remains, so long as thou art an unbeliever, however they may disappear in the outward act. Thy heart is not emptied of one sin, but the vent stopped by restraining grace. A bottle full of wine, close stopped, shews no more what it hath in it, than one that is empty; and if that is thy case, how is it possible thou shouldst truly mortify any one lust, that hath no faith, which is the only victory of the world? In a word, if under the convincement of thy unbelief, thou wilt find, how little a sin soever now it is thought by thee, that there is more malignity in it than in all thy other sins. Hast thou been a liar? that is a grievous sin indeed; hell gapes for every one that loveth and maketh a lie, Rev. xxii. 15. But know, poor wretch, the loudest lie which ever thou toldest is that which by unbelief thou tellest; here, thou bearest false witness against God himself, and tellest a lie, not 'to the Holy Ghost,' as Ananias did, but a lie of the Holy Ghost; as if not a word were true he saith in the promises of the gospel. If 'he that believes sets to his seal that God is true;' judge you, whether the unbeliever makes him not a liar. Hast thou been a murderer, yea, had thy hand in the blood of saints, the best of men? This is a dreadful sin, I confess; but by thy unbelief thou art a more bloody murderer, by how much the blood of God is more precious than the blood of mere men. Thou killest Christ over again by thy unbelief, and treadest his blood under thy feet; yea, throwest it under Satan's feet to be trampled on by him.

SECTION II.—*Quest.* But how can unbelief be so great a sin, when it is not in the sinner's power to believe?—*Answ.* By this reason the unregenerate person might wipe off any other sin, and shake off the guilt of it, with but saying, It is not my fault that I do not keep this commandment or that, for I have no power of myself to do them. This is true; he cannot perform one holy action holily and acceptably; 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God,' Rom. viii. 8. But, it is a false inference, that therefore he doth not sin, because he can do no other. First, Because this inability is not created by God, but contracted by the creature himself. 'God made man upright, but they sought out many inventions,' Eccles. vii. 29. Man had not his lame hand from God; no, he was made a creature fit and able for any service his Maker would please to employ him in; but man crippled himself; and man's fault cannot prejudice God's right. Though he hath lost his ability to obey, yet God hath not lost his power to command. Who among ourselves thinks his debtor discharged, by wasting that estate whereby he was able to have paid us? It is confessed, had man stood, he should not, indeed could not have believed on Christ for salvation, as now he is held forth in the gospel; but this was not from any disability in man, but from the unmeetness of such an object to Adam's holy state. If it had been a duty meet for God to command, there was ability in man to have obeyed. Secondly, Man's present impotency to yield obedience to the commands of God, and in particular to this of believing (where it is promulgated), doth afford him no excuse; because it is not a simple inability, but complicated with an inward enmity against the command. It is true, man cannot believe: but it is as true, man will not believe: 'Ye will not come unto me, that you might have life,' John v. 40. It is possible, yea, ordinary, that a man may, through some feebleness and deficiency of strength, be disabled to do that which he is very willing to do, and this draws out our pity; such a one was the 'poor cripple,' who lay so long at the 'pool,' John v. 5. He was willing enough to have stepped down, if he could but have crept thither; or that any other should have helped him in, if they would have been so kind. But, what would you think of such a cripple, that can neither go himself into the pool for healing nor is willing any should help him in, but flies in the face of him that would do him this friendly office? Every unbeliever is this cripple; he is not only impotent himself, but a resister of the Holy Ghost, that comes to woo and draw him unto Christ. Indeed, every one that believes, believes willingly; but he is beholden, not to nature, but to grace, for this willingness; none are willing till the day of power comes, Psa. cx. 3; in which the Spirit of God overshadows the soul, and by his incubation (as once upon the waters) he new-forms and moulds the will into a sweet compliance with the call of God in the gospel.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTAINS A SECOND DIRECTION FOR THE OBTAINING FAITH.

SECONDLY, Take heed of resisting or opposing the Spirit of God, when he offers his help to the work. If ever thou believest, he must enable thee; take heed of opposing him. Master workmen love not to be controlled. Now, two ways the Spirit of God may be opposed. First, when the creature waits not on the Spirit, where he ordinarily works faith. Secondly, when the creature, though he attends on him in the way of means, yet controls him in his work.

First, Take heed thou opposest not the Spirit, by not attending on him on the way and means, by which he ordinarily works faith. Thou knowest where Jesus useth to pass, and his Spirit breathe; and that is in the great gospel ordinance, the ministry of the word. Christ's sheep ordinarily conceive when they are drinking the water of life here. The hearing of the gospel, it is called Gal. iii. 2, 'The hearing of faith;' because, by hearing the doctrine of faith, the Spirit works the grace of faith in them. This is the still voice he speaks to the souls of sinners in: 'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers, and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it,' Isa. xxx. 20. Here are God and man teaching together. Thou canst not neglect man's teaching, but thou resistest the Spirit also. It was for something that the apostle placed them so near, 1 Thess. v. 19: he bids us 'quench not the Spirit;' and in the next words, 'despise not prophesyings;' surely he would have us know that the Spirit is dangerously quenched, when prophesying, or preaching of the gospel, is despised. Now, the most notorious way of despising prophesying, or preaching, is to turn our back on the ordinance, and not attend on it. When God sets up the ministry of the word in a place, his Spirit then opens his school, and expects that all, who would be taught for heaven, should come thither. O take heed of playing the truant, and absenting thyself from the ordinance, upon any unnecessary occasion, much less of casting off the ordinance. If he tempts God, that would be kept from sin, and yet will not keep out of the circle of the occasion that leads to the sin; then he tempts God as much that would have faith, and pretends his desire is that the Spirit should work it, but will not come within the ordinary walk of the Spirit, where he doth the work: whether is it most fitting, that the scholar should wait on his master at school to be taught, or that the master should run after his truant scholar at play in the field to teach him there, judge you.

Secondly, Take heed that, in thy attendance on the word, thou dost not control the Spirit in those several steps he takes in thy soul, in order to the production of faith. Though there are no preparatory works of our own to grace; yet the Holy Spirit hath his preparatory works, whereby he disposeth souls to grace. Observe therefore carefully the gradual approaches he makes by the word to thy soul, for want of complying with him in which he may withdraw in a distaste, and leave the work at a sad stand for a time, if not quite give it over, never more to return to it. We read, Acts vii. 23, how it came into the heart of Moses to visit his brethren in Egypt (stirred up, no doubt, by God himself to the journey); there he begins to shew his good-will to them and zeal for them in slaying an Egyptian, that had wronged an Israelite; which, though no great matter towards their full deliverance out of Egypt, yet he supposed (it is said, ver. 25) his brethren would have understood by that hint, how that God would by his hand deliver them; but they did not comply with him, nay, rather opposed him; and therefore he withdrew, and they hear no more of Moses or their deliverance, 'for forty years' space,' verse 40. Thus, may be, the Spirit of God gives thee a visit in an ordinance, directs a word that speaks to thy particular condition. He would have thee understand by this, sinner, how ready he is to help thee out of thy house of bondage, thy state of sin and wrath, if thou wilt hearken to his counsel, and kindly entertain his motions; carry thyself rebelliously now against him, and God knows when thou mayest hear of him again knocking at thy door upon such an errand. God makes short work with some in his judiciary proceedings. If he finds a repulse once, sometimes he departs, and leaves a dismal curse behind him as the punishment of it, Luke xiv. 24: 'I say unto you, that none of those men which

Digitized by Google

were bidden shall taste of my supper.' They were but once invited, and for their first denial this curse clapped upon their heads. It is not said, they shall never come where the supper stands on the board, but they shall never taste. Many sit under the ordinances, where Christ in gospel dishes is set forth admirably, but through the efficacy of this curse upon them never taste of these dainties all their life; they hear precious truths, but their hearts are sealed up in unbelief, and their minds made reprobate and injudicious, that they are not moved at all by them. There is a kind of frenzy and madness, I have heard of, in which a man will discourse soberly and rationally, till you come to speak of some one particular subject that was the occasion of his distemper, and first broke his brain; here he is quite out, and presently loses his reason, not able to speak with any understanding of it. O how many men and women are there among us (frequent attenders on the word) who, in any matter of the world, are able to discourse very understandingly and rationally, but when you come to speak of the things of God, Christ, and heaven, it is strange to see how soon their reason is lost, and all understanding gone from them; they are not able to speak of these matters with any judgment! Truly I am afraid in many (who have sat long under the means, and the Spirit hath been making some attempts on them,) this injudiciousness of mind in the things of God is but the consequence of that spiritual curse, which God hath passed upon them, for resisting these essays of his Spirit. I beseech you, therefore, beware of opposing the Spirit. Doth he beam any light from his word into thy understanding, whereby thou, who wert before an ignorant sot, comest to know something of the evil of sin, the excellency of Christ, and canst discourse rationally of the truths of the Scripture? Look now to it, what thou dost with this candle of the Lord that is lighted in thy mind; take heed thou art not found sinning with it, or priding thyself in it, lest it go out, and thou, for 'rebelling against the light,' comest at last 'to die without knowledge,' as is threatened, Job xxxvi. 12. If the Spirit of God goes yet further, and fortifies the light in thy understanding, that it sets thy conscience on fire with the sense of thy sins, and apprehensions of the wrath due to them, now take heed of resisting the Holy Spirit, that in mercy to thy soul kindles this fire in thy bosom, to keep thee out of a worse in hell, if thou wilt be ruled by him. Thou must expect that Satan, now his house is on fire over his head, will bestir him what he can to quench it: thy danger is, lest thou shouldst listen to him for thy present ease. Take heed, therefore, where thou drawest thy water with which thou quenchest this fire, that it be out of no well but out of the word of God. In thinking to quiet thy conscience, thou mayest quench the Spirit of God in thy conscience, which is the mischief the devil longs thou shouldst pull upon thy own head. There is more hope of a sick man, when his disease comes out, than when it lies at the heart, and nothing is seen outwardly. You know how Hazael helped his master to his sad end, who might have lived for all his disease, 2 Kings viii. 15: 'He took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died;' and it follows, 'and Hazael reigned in his stead.' Thus the wretch came to the crown: he saw the king like to recover, and he drove his disease, in all probability, to his heart by the wet cloth, and so by his death made a way for himself to the throne. And truly, Satan will not much fear to recover the throne of thy heart) (which this present combustion in thy conscience puts him in great fear of losing,) can he but persuade thee to apply some carnal coolings to it, thereby to quench the Spirit in his convincing work. These convictions are sent thee mercifully in order to thy spiritual delivery, and they should be as welcome to thee as the kindly bearing pains of a woman in travail are to her: without them she could not be delivered of her child, nor without these, more or less, can the new creature be brought forth in thy soul.

Again, May be the Spirit of God goes yet further, and doth not only dart light into thy mind, hell-fire into thy conscience, but heaven-fire also into thy affections: my meaning is, he, from the word, displays Christ so in his own excellencies, and the fitness of him in all his offices to thy wants, that thy affections begin to work after him; the frequent discourses of him, and the mercy of God through him to poor sinners, are so luscious, that thou beginnest to taste some sweetness in hearing of them, which stirs up some passionate

Digitized by Google

desires, whereby thou art, in hearing the word, often sallying forth in such like breathings as these: O that Christ was mine! Shall I ever be the happy soul whom God will pardon and save? Yea, possibly, in the heat of thy affections, thou art cursing thy lusts and Satan, who have held thee so long from Christ, and sudden purposes are taken up by thee, that thou wilt bid adieu to thy former ways, and break through all the entreaties of thy dearest lusts, to come to Christ. O soul! now the kingdom of God is nigh indeed unto thee. Thou art, as I may so say, even upon thy quickening; and therefore, above all, this is the chief season of thy care, lest thou shouldst miscarry. If these sudden desires did but ripen into a deliberate choice of Christ, and these purposes settle into a permanent resolution to renounce sin and self, and so thou cast thyself on Christ, I durst be the messenger to joy thee with the birth of this babe of grace (faith I mean) in thy soul. I confess affections are up and down, yea, like the wind, how strongly soever they seem to blow the soul one way at present, are often found in the quite contrary point very soon after. A man may be drunk with passion and affection as really as with wine or beer; and as it is ordinary for a man to make a bargain when he is in beer or wine, which he repents of when he is sober again, so it is as ordinary for poor creatures who make choice of Christ and his ways in a sermon, (while their affections have been elevated above their ordinary pitch by some moving discourse,) to repent of all they have done, awhile after, when the impression of the word, which heated their affections in hearing, be worn off, and then they come to themselves again, and are what they were, as far from any such desires after Christ as ever. Content not, therefore, thyself with some sudden pangs of affections in an ordinance, but labour to preserve those impressions which then the Spirit makes on thy soul, that they be not defaced and rubbed off, like colours newly laid on, before they are dry, by the next temptation that comes. This is the caveat of the apostle, Heb. ii. 1: 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip,' or run out like leaking vessels. May be, at present, thy heart is melting and in a flow with sorrow for thy sins, and thou thinkest, Surely now I shall never give my lust a kind look more; (indeed, one might wonder, to see the solemn mournful countenance under a sermon, which of these could be the man or woman that would afterwards be seen walking in hand in hand with those sins they now weep to hear mentioned.) But as thou lovest thy life, watch thy soul, lest this prove but as the early dew, none of which is to be seen at noon. Do thou, therefore, as those do who have stood some while in a hot bath, out of which when they come they do not presently go into the open air, (that were enough to kill them,) but betake themselves to their warm bed, that they may nourish this kindly heat, and now, while their pores are open by a gentle sweat, breathe out more effectually the remaining dregs of their distemper. Thus betake thyself to thy closet, and there labour to take the advantage of thy present relenting frame for the more free pouring out of thy soul to God, now the ordinance hath thawed the tap, and with all thy soul beg of God he would not leave thee short of faith, and suffer thee to miscarry, now he hath thee upon the wheel, but make thee a vessel unto honour, which follows as the third direction.

CHAPTER IX.

CONTAINING THREE DIRECTIONS MORE TOWARDS THE OBTAINING FAITH.

THIRDLY, Lift up thy cry aloud in prayer to God for faith.

SECTION I.—*Quest.* But may an unbeliever pray? Some think he ought not.—*Ans.* This is ill news if it were true, even for some who do believe, but dare not say that they are believers. It were enough to scare them from prayer too; and so it would be as Satan would have it, that God should have few or none to vouch him in this solemn part of his worship; for they are but the fewest of believers that can walk to the throne of grace in view of their own faith. Prayer it is *medium cultus*, and also *medium gratiæ;* a means whereby we give worship to God, and also wait to receive grace from God; so that to say a wicked man ought not to pray, is to say he ought not to worship God, and acknowledge him to be his Maker: and also, that he ought not to wait on the

Digitized by Google

means whereby he may obtain grace, and receive faith. 'Prayer is the soul's motion Godward,' says Baxter, 'and to say an unbeliever should not pray, is to say he should not turn to God, who yet saith to the wicked, Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. 'Desire is the soul of prayer,' saith the same learned author, 'and who dares say to the wicked, Desire not faith, desire not Christ or God?' in his Right Method for Peace of Conscience, p. 63. It cannot, indeed, be denied, but that an unbeliever sins when he prays; but it is not his praying is his sin, but in his praying unbelievingly. And therefore he sins less in praying, than in neglecting to pray; because when he prays, his sin lies but in the circumstance and manner; but when he doth not pray, then he stands in a total defiance to the duty God hath commanded him to perform, and means God hath appointed him to use for obtaining grace. I must, therefore, poor soul, bid thee go on for all these bugbears, and neglect not this grand duty, which lies upon all the sons and daughters of men; only go in the sense of thy own vileness, and take heed of carrying purposes of going on in sin with thee to the throne of grace; this were a horrible wickedness indeed. As if a traitor should put on the livery which the prince's servants wear, for no other end but to gain more easy access to his person, that he might stab him with a dagger he hath under that cloak. Is it not enough to sin, but wouldst thou make God accessory to his own dishonour also? By this bold enterprise thou dost what lies in thee to do it. Should this be thy temper (which God forbid), if I send thee to pray, it must be with Peter's counsel to Simon Magus, Acts viii. 22; 'Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.' But I suppose thee, to whom now I am directing my advice, to be of a far different complexion, one brought to some sense of thy deplored state, and so softened by the word, that thou couldst be content to have Christ upon any terms: only thou art at a loss in thy own thoughts how such an impotent creature, yea, impudent sinner as thou hast been, should ever come to believe on him. So that it is not the love of any present sin in thy heart, but the fear of thy past sins in thy conscience that keeps thee from believing. Now for thee it is that I would gather the best encouragements I can out of the word, and with them strew thy way to the throne of grace. Go, poor soul, to prayer for faith; I do not fear a chiding for sending such customers to God's door. He that sends us to call sinners home unto him, cannot be angry to hear thee call upon him. He is not so thronged with such suitors, as that he can find in his heart to send them away with a denial that come with this request in their mouths. Christ complains that sinners 'will not come unto him, that they may have life;' and dost think he will let any complain of him, that they desire to come, and he is unwilling they should? Cheer up thy heart, poor creature, and knock boldly; thou hast a friend in God's own bosom that will procure thy welcome. He that could, without any prayer made to him, give Christ for thee, will not be unwilling, now thou so earnestly prayest, to give faith unto thee. What thou prayest God to give, he commands thee to do: 'This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus,' 1 John iii. 23. So that in praying for faith, thou prayest that 'his will may be done by thee:' yea, that part of his will which above all, he desires should be done, called therefore with an emphasis, 'The work of God,' John vi. 29: 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' As if Christ had said, If ye do not this, ye do nothing for God: and surely Christ knew his Father's mind best. O how welcome must that prayer be to God which falls in with his chiefest design! Joab found his request in the mouth of the woman of Tekoah to take as he would have it: how could it do otherwise, when he asked nothing but what the king liked better than himself did, or could? And doth it not please God more, thinkest thou, how strong soever thy desires for faith are, that a poor humbled sinner should believe, than it can do to the creature himself? Methinks, by this time, thou shouldst begin to promise thyself, poor soul, a happy return of this thy adventure, which thou hast now sent to heaven. But for thy further encouragement know, that this grace which thou so wantest and makest thy moan to God for, it is a principal part of Christ's purchase. That blood, which is the price of pardon, is the price of faith also, by which poor sinners may come to have the benefit of that pardon. As he hath bought off that wrath which man's sin had

Digitized by Google

justly kindled in God's heart against him; so he hath also that enmity which the heart of the creature is filled with against God: and paid for a new stock of grace, wherewith his bankrupt creature may again set up: so that, poor soul, when thou goest to pray for faith, look up unto Christ, as having a bank of grace lying by him, to give out to poor sinners who see they have nothing of their own to begin with, and in the sense of this their beggary, repair to him. 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them,' Psa. lxviii. 18. This is, beyond all doubt, meant of Christ, and to him applied, Eph. iv. 8. Now observe, First, A bank and treasure of gifts in the hand of Christ,—'Thou hast.' Secondly, Who intrusts him with them, and that is his Father,—'Thou hast received gifts;' that is, Christ of his Father. Thirdly, When, or upon what considerations, doth the Father deposit this treasure into Christ's hands?—'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received,' &c. That is, when Christ had vanquished sin and Satan by his death, and rode in the triumphant chariot of his ascension into heaven's glorious city, then did Christ receive these gifts as the purchase of his blood, and the payment of an old debt, which God, before the foundation of the world, when the covenant was transacted and struck, promised his Son, upon the condition of his discharging sinful man's debt, with the effusion of his own precious blood unto death. Fourthly, The persons for whose use Christ received these gifts,—'For men,' not angels; for 'rebellious' men, not men without sin; so that, poor soul, thy sinful nature and life do not make thee an excepted person, and shut thee out from receiving any of this dole. Lastly, Observe the nature of these gifts, and the end they are given Christ for,—'That God may dwell in them,' or with them. Now nothing but faith can make a soul that hath been rebellious, a place meet for the holy God to dwell in. This is the gift, indeed, he received all other gifts for, in a manner. Wherefore the gifts of the Spirit and ministry, 'apostles, teachers, pastors,' &c., but that by these he might work faith in the hearts of poor sinners? Let this give thee boldness, poor soul, humbly to press God for that which Christ hath paid for: say, Lord, I have been a rebellious wretch indeed, but did Christ receive nothing for such? I have an unbelieving heart, but I hear there is faith paid for in thy covenant; Christ shed his blood that thou mightest shed forth thy Spirit on poor sinners. Dost thou think, that while thou art thus pleading with God, and using Christ's name in prayer to move him that Christ himself can sit within hearing of all this, and not befriend thy motion to his Father? Surely he is willing that what God is indebted to him should be paid: and therefore when thou beggest faith upon the account of his death, thou shalt find him ready to join issue with thee in the same prayer to his Father. Indeed, he went to heaven on purpose that poor returning souls might not want a friend at court, when they come with their humble petitions thither.

SECTION II.—Fourthly, Converse much with the promises, and be frequently pondering them in thy musing thoughts. It is indeed the Spirit's work, and only his, to bottom thy soul upon the promise, and give his word a being by faith in thy heart; this thou canst not do; yet as fire came down from heaven upon Elijah's sacrifice, when he had laid the wood in order, and gone as far as he could; so thou mayest comfortably hope that then the Spirit of God will come with spiritual light and life, to quicken the promise upon thy heart, when thou hast been conscionably diligent in meditating on the promise; if withal thou ownest God in the thing, as he did, who, when he had laid all in order, lifts up his heart to God in prayer, expecting all from him, 1 Kings xviii. 36. I know no more speedy way to invite the Spirit of God to our assistance than this. As he tempts the devil to tempt him, that lets his eyes gaze or his thoughts gad upon a lustful object; so he bespeaks the Holy Spirit's company, that lets out his thought upon holy, heavenly objects. We need not doubt but the Spirit of God is as willing to cherish any good motion, as the infernal spirit is to nourish that which is evil. We find the spouse sitting under the shadow of her beloved, as one under an apple-tree, Cant. ii. 3; and presently she tells us, 'his fruit was sweet to her taste.' What doth this her sitting under his shadow better signify, than a soul sitting under the thoughts of Christ, and the precious promises that grow out of him, as branches out of a tree? Do but, O Christian,

Digitized by Google

place thyself here awhile, and it were strange if the Spirit should not shake some fruit from one branch or another into thy lap. Thou knowest not, but as Isaac met his bride when he went into the fields to meditate, so thou mayest meet thy beloved, while walking by thy meditations in this garden of the promises.

SECTION III.—Lastly, Press and urge thy soul home with that strong obligation that lies upon thee, a poor humbled sinner, to believe. Possibly God hath shamed thee in the sight of thy own conscience for other sins, that thou loathest the very thought of them, and durst as well run thy head into the fire, as allow thyself in them. If thou shouldst wrong thy neighbour in his person, name, or estate, it would kindle a fire in thy conscience, and make thee afraid to look within doors (converse, I mean, with thy own thoughts), till thou hadst repented of it; and is faith the only indifferent thing, a business left to thy own choice, whether thou wilt be so good to thyself, as to believe or no? Truly the tenderness of conscience which many humbled sinners express, in trembling at, and smiting them for other sins, compared with the little sense they express for this of unbelief, speaks as if they thought they offended God in them, and only wronged themselves by this their unbelief. O how greatly art thou deceived and abused in thy own thoughts, if these be thy apprehensions; yea, if thou dost not think thou dishonourest God, and offendest him in a more transcendent manner by thy unbelief, than by all thy other sins. What Bernard saith of a hard heart, I may say of an unbelieving heart: *Illud cor vere durum, quod non trepidat ad nomen cordis duri.* That is a hard heart, indeed, saith he, that trembles not at the name of a hard heart. And that an unbelieving heart, indeed, that trembles not at the name of an unbelieving heart. Call thyself, O man, to the bar, and hear what thy soul hath to say for its not closing with Christ, and thou shalt then see what an unreasonable reason it will give. It must be either because thou likest not the terms, or else because thou fearest they are too good ever to be performed. Is the first of these thy reason, because thou likest not the terms on which Christ is offered? Possibly mightest thou but have had Christ and thy lust with him, thou wouldst have been better pleased; but to part with thy lusts to gain a Christ, this thou thinkest is a hard saying. It is strange this should offend thee, which God could not have left out, and truly have loved us. Thou art a sot, a devil, if thou dost not think thy sins the worst piece of thy misery. O what is Christ worth in thy thoughts, if thou darest not trust him to recompense the loss of a base lust? That man values gold little, who thinks he shall pay too dear for it by throwing the dirt or dung out of his hands, with which they are full, to receive it. Well, sinner, the terms for having Christ, it seems, content thee not; ask then thy soul how the terms on which thou holdest thy lusts like thee; canst thou, thinkest thou, better spare the blissful presence of God and Christ in hell, where thy lusts, if thou holdest of this mind, are sure enough to leave thee at last, than the company of thy lusts in heaven, whither faith in Christ would as certainly bring thee? Then take thy choice, and leave it for thy work in hell to repent of thy folly. But I should think if thou wouldst be so faithful to thyself, as to state the case right, and then seriously acquaint thy soul with it, giving it time and leisure to dwell upon it daily, that thou wouldst soon come to have better thoughts of Christ, and worse of thy sins. But may be, this is not the reason that keeps thee from believing; the terms thou likest highly; but it cannot enter into thy heart to think that ever such great things as are promised should be performed to such a one as thou art. Well, of the two, it is better that the rub in thy way to Christ should lie in the difficulty that thy understanding finds to conceive, than in the obstinacy of thy will not to receive what God in Christ offers; but this must be removed also. And, therefore, fall to work with thy soul, and labour to bring it to reason in this particular; for, indeed, nothing can be more irrational, than to object against the reality and certainty of God's promises. Two things well wrought on thy soul, would satisfy thy doubts and scatter thy fears as to this. First, Labour to get a right notion of God in thy understanding, and it will not appear strange at all that a great God should do so great things for poor sinners. If a beggar should promise you a thousand pounds a year, you might indeed slight it, and ask where he should have it; but if a prince should promise more, you would listen after it, because he hath an estate that bears proportion to his promise. God is not engaged for more by

Digitized by Google

promise, than infinite mercy, power, and faithfulness can see discharged. 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Psa. xlvi. 10; of this psalm Luther would say in times of great confusion in the church, 'Let us sing the forty-sixth psalm in spite of the devil and all his instruments.' And this clause of it, poor humbled soul, thou mayest sing with comfort in spite of Satan and sin also. 'Be still,' O my soul, and know that he who offers thee mercy, 'he is God;' they that know his name will trust in him. Secondly, Peruse well the securities which this great God gives for the performance of his promise to the believer, and thou shalt find them so many and great (though his bare word deserves to be taken for more than our souls are worth), that if we had the most slippery cheating companion in the world under such bonds for the payment of a sum of money, we should think it were sure enough; and wilt thou not rest satisfied, when the true and faithful God puts himself under these for thy security, whose truth is so immutable, that it is more possible for light to send forth darkness, than it is that a lie should come out of his blessed lips?

CHAPTER X.

AN EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS, ABOVE ALL TO LOOK TO THEIR FAITH, WITH SOME DIRECTIONS FOR THE PRESERVING IT.

I NOW turn myself to you that are believers, in a double exhortation.

First, Seeing faith is such a choice grace, be stirred up to a more than ordinary care to preserve faith. Keep that, and it will keep thee, and all thy other graces. Thou standest by faith; if that falls, thou fallest: where shall we find thee then but under thy enemy's feet? Be sensible of any danger thy faith is in; like that Grecian captain, who, being knocked down in fight, asked as soon as he came to himself, where his shield was. This he was solicitous for above anything else. O, be asking in this temptation, and that duty, where is thy faith, and how it fares; this is the grace which God would have us chiefly judge and value ourselves by, because there is the least danger of priding in this self-emptying grace of any other, Rom. xii. 3: 'I say, through the grace of God given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.' There were many gifts which the Romans received from God, but he would have them think of themselves rather by their faith; and the reason is, that they may think soberly. Indeed, all other graces are to be tried by our faith; if they be not fruits of faith, they are of no true worth. This is the difference between a Christian and an honest heathen. He values himself on his patience, temperance, liberality, and other moral virtues which he hath to shew above others; these he expects will commend him to God, and procure him a happiness after death; and in these he glories, and makes his boast while he lives. But the Christian is kept sober in the sight of these, though they commence graces in him, that were but virtues in the heathen, because he hath a discovery of Christ, whose righteousness and holiness by faith becomes his; and he values himself by these, more than what is inherent in him. I cannot better illustrate this than by two men; the one a courtier, the other a countryman, and a stranger to court; both having fair estates, but the courtier greatest by far. Ask the country gentleman that hath no relation to court, or place in the prince's favour, what he is worth, and he will tell you, as much as his lands and moneys amount to; these he values himself by: but ask the courtier what he is worth, and he, though he hath more land and money by far than the other, will tell you he values himself by the favour of his prince, more than by all his other estate. I can speak a big word saith he; what my prince hath is mine, except his crown and royalty; his purse mine to maintain me, his love to embrace me, his power to defend me. The poor heathens being strangers to God, and his favour in Christ, they blessed themselves in the improvement of their natural stock, and that treasure of moral virtues which they had gathered together with their industry: and the restraint that was laid upon their corruptions by a secret hand, they were not aware of. But the believer having access by faith into this grace, wherein he stands so high in court favour with God by Jesus Christ, he doth and ought to value himself chiefly by his faith, rather than any other grace. Though none can shew these graces in their true, heavenly

Digitized by Google

beauty besides himself, yet it is not in these, but in Christ, who is his by faith, that he blesseth himself. The believer, he can say, through mercy, that he hath a heart beautified with those heavenly graces, to which the heathen's mock virtues, and the proud self justiciary's mock graces also, are no more to be compared, than the image in the glass is to the face, or the shadow to the man himself. He can say he hath that holiness in truth, which they have but in shew and semblance. And this grace of God in him he values infinitely above all the world's treasure or pleasure; he had rather be the ragged saint than the robed sinner; yea, above his natural life, which he can be willing to lose, and count himself no loser, may he thereby but secure this his spiritual life. But this is not the biggest word that a believer can say; he is not only partaker of the Divine nature by that principle of holiness infused in him, but he is heir to all the holiness, yea, all the glorious perfections that are in God himself. All that God is, hath, or doth, he hath leave to call his own. God is pleased to be called his people's God, 'the God of Israel,' 2 Sam. xxiii. 3. As a man's house and land bears the owner's name upon it, so God is graciously pleased to carry his people's name on him, that all the world may know who are they he belongs to. Naboth's field is called 'the portion of Naboth,' 2 Kings ix. 21; so God is called 'the portion of Jacob,' Jer. x. 16. Nothing hath God kept from his people, saving his crown and glory: that, indeed, 'he will not give to another,' Isa. xlii. 8. If the Christian wants strength, God would have him make use of his; and that he may do it boldly and confidently, the Lord calls himself his people's strength, 1 Sam. xv. 29: 'The Strength of Israel will not lie.' Is it righteousness and holiness he is scanted in? behold where it is brought unto his hand: 'Christ is made unto us righteousness,' 1 Cor. i. 13, called therefore 'The Lord our righteousness,' Jer. xxxiii. 16. Is it love and mercy they would have? all the mercy in God is at their service: Psa. xxxi. 19, 'O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!' Mark the phrase, 'laid up for them;' his mercy and goodness it is intended for them, as a father that lays by such a sum of money, and writes on the bag, This is a portion for such a child. But how comes the Christian to have this right to God, and all that vast and untold treasure of happiness which is in him? This indeed is greatly to be heeded; it is faith that gives him a good title unto all this. That which maketh him a child makes him an heir. Now faith makes him a child of God: John i. 12, 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on him.' As therefore, if you would not call your birthright into question, and bring your interest in Christ, and those glorious privileges that come along with him, under a sad dispute in your soul, look to your faith.

Quest. But what counsel, may the Christian say, can you give for the preserving of my faith?—*Ans.* To this I answer in these followiug particulars.

First, That which was instrumental to beget thy faith will be helpful to preserve thy faith; I mean the word of God. As it was seed for the former purpose in thy conversion, so now it is milk for the present sustentation of thy faith: lie sucking at this breast, and that often. Children cannot suck long, nor digest much at a time, and therefore need the more frequent returns of their meals; such children are all believers in this world. 'Precept must be upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little;' the breast often drawn out for the nourishing of them up in their spiritual life, or else they cannot subsist. It was not ordinary that Moses should look so well as he did after he had fasted so long, Exod. xxxiv. And truly it is a miraculous faith they must have who will undertake to keep their faith alive without taking any spiritual repast from the word. I have heard of some children that have been taken from their mother's breast as soon almost as born, and brought up by hand, who yet have done well for their natural life; but I shall not believe that a creature can thrive in his spiritual life who casts off ordinances, and weans himself from the word, till I hear of some other way of provision that God hath made for the ordinary maintenance of it besides this; and I despair of living so long as to see this proved. I know some, that we may hope well of, have been for a time persuaded to turn their backs on the word and ordinances; but they have returned well hunger-bitten to their old fare again; yea, with Naomi's bitter complaint in their mouths, 'I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me

Digitized by Google

home again empty,' Ruth i. 21. And happy for them that they are come to their stomachs in this life, before this food be taken off the table, never more to be set on. He that taught Christians to pray for their daily bread, did suppose they had need of it; and surely he did not mean only or chiefly corporeal bread, who in the same chapter bids them 'seek first the kingdom of God,' Matt. vi. 33. Well, Christian, prize thou the word, feed on the word, whether in be dished up in a sermon at the public, or in a conference with some Christian friend in private, or in a more secret duty of reading and meditation by thy solitary self. Let none of these be disused, or carnally used by thee; and with God's blessing, thou shalt reap the benefit of it in thy faith. When thy stomach fails to the word, thy faith must needs begin to fail on the word. O that Christians who are so much in complaints of their weak faith, would but turn their complaints into inquiries why it is so weak and declining! Is it not because faith hath missed its wonted meals from the word? Thou haply hast formerly broke through many straits to keep thy acquaintance with God in his word, and wert well paid for that time which thou didst borrow of thy other occasions for this end, by that sweet temper then thou foundest thy heart in to trust God and rely upon him in all conditions; but now, since thou hast discontinued thy acquaintance with God in those his ordinances, thou perceivest a sad change: where thou couldst have trusted God, now thou art suspicious of him; those promises that were able in thy mutiny and hubbub of thy unruly passions to have hushed and quieted all in thy soul at their appearing in thy thoughts, have now, alas! but little authority over thy murmuring, unbelieving heart, to keep it in any tolerable order. If it be thus with thee, poor soul, thy case is sad, and I cannot give thee better counsel for thy soul than that which physicians give men in a consumption, for their bodies. They ask them where they were born and bred up; and to that their native air they send them as the best means to recover them. Thus, soul, let me ask thee, if thou ever hadst faith, where was it born and bred up; was it not in the sweet air of ordinances, hearing, meditating, conferring of the word, and praying over the word? Go, poor creature, and get thee as fast as thou canst into thy native air, where thou didst draw thy first Christian breath, and where thy faith did so thrive and grow for a time. No means more hopeful to set thy feeble faith on its legs again than this,

Secondly, Wouldst thou preserve thy faith, look to thy conscience. A good conscience is the bottom faith sails in; if the conscience be wrecked, how can it be thought that faith should be safe? If faith be the jewel, a good conscience is the cabinet in which it is kept; and if the cabinet be broken, the jewel must needs be in danger of losing. Now you know what sins waste the conscience; sins either deliberately committed, or impenitently continued in. O take heed of deliberate sin; like a stone thrown into a clear stream, it will so disturb thy soul, and muddy it, that thou, who even now couldst see thy interest in the promise, wilt now be at a loss, and not know what to think of thyself. They are like a fire on the top of the house, it will be no easy matter to quench it. But if thou hast been so unhappy as to fall into such a slough, take heed of lying in it by impenitence: the sheep may fall into a ditch, but it is the swine that wallows in it; and therefore how hard wilt thou find it, thinkest thou, to act thy faith on the promise when thou art, by thy filthy garments and besmeared countenance, so unlike one of God's holy ones! It is dangerous to drink poison, but far more to let it lie in the body long. Thou canst not act thy faith, though a believer, on the promise, so as to apply the pardon it presents to thy soul, till thou hast renewed thy repentance.

Thirdly, Exercise thy faith, if thou meanest to preserve thy faith. We live by faith, and faith lives by exercise. As we say of some stirring men, they are never well but at work; confine them to their bed or chair, and you kill them: so here, hinder faith from working, and you are enemies to the very life and being of it. Why do we act faith so little in prayer, but because we are no more frequent in it. Let the child seldom see its father or mother, and when he comes in their presence, he will not make much after them. Why are we no more able to live on a promise when at a plunge? surely, because we live no more with the promise. The more we converse with the promise, the more confidence we shall put in it. We do not trust strangers as we do our

Digitized by Google

neighbours, in whose company we are almost every day. It were a rare way to secure our faith, yea, to advance it and all our other graces, would we, in our daily course, labour to do all our actions, as in obedience to the command, so in faith on the promise. But, alas! how many enterprises are undertaken where faith is not called in, nor the promise consulted with from one end of the business to the other! And, therefore, when we would make use of faith in some particular strait wherein we think ourselves to be more than ordinarily at a loss, our faith itself is at a loss, and to seek, like a servant who, because his master very seldom employs him, makes bold to be gadding abroad, and so when his master doth call him upon some extraordinary occasion, he is out of the way and not to be found. O Christian, take heed of letting your faith be long out of work; if you do not use it when you ought, it may fail you when you desire most to act it.

Fourthly, Take special notice of that unbelief which yet remains in thee, and as it is putting forth daily its head in thy Christian course, be sure thou loadest thy soul with the sense of it, and deeply humblest thyself before God for it. What thy faith looseth by every act of unbelief, it recovers again by renewing thy repentance. David's faith was on the mending hand when he could shame himself heartily for his unbelief, Psa. lxxiii. 22. He confesseth how foolish and ignorant he was: 'Yea,' saith he, 'I was a beast before thee;' so irrational and brutish his unbelieving thoughts now appeared to him. And by this ingenuous, humble confession, the malignity of his distemper breathes out, that he is presently in his old temper again, and his faith is able to act as high as ever. 'Thou hast holden me by my right hand; thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and after receive me to glory,' ver. 23, 24. But, so long thy unbelief is sure to grow upon thee, as thou art unhumbled for it. We have the reason why the people of Laish were so bad, Judges xviii. 7: 'There was no magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything.' Christian, thou hast a magistrate in thy bosom, commissioned by God himself, to check, reprove, and shame thee, when thou sinnest: indeed, all things go to wreck in that soul where this doth not its office; hear, therefore, what this hath to charge thee with, that thou mayest be ashamed. There is no sin dishonours God more than unbelief, and this sword cuts his name deepest when in the hand of a saint. O to be wounded in the house of his friends! this goes near the tender heart of God. And there is reason enough why God should take this sin so unkindly at a saint's hand, if we consider the near relation such a one stands in to God. It would grieve an indulgent father to see his own child come into court, and there bear witness against him, and charge him of some untruth in his words, more than if a stranger should do it; because the testimony of a child, though when it is for the vindication of a parent, may loose some credit in the opinion of those that hear it, upon the suspicion of partiality; yet when against a parent, it seems to carry some more probability of truth than what another that is a stranger says against him; because the bond of natural affection with which the child is bound to his parent is so sacred, that it will not be easily suspected; he can offer violence to it only upon the more inviolable necessity of bearing witness to the truth. O think of this, Christian, again and again. By thy unbelief thou bearest false witness against God; and if thou, a child of God, speakest no better of thy heavenly Father, and presentest him in no fairer character to the world, it will be no wonder if they be confirmed in their hard thoughts of God, even to final impenitency and unbelief, when they shall see how little credit he finds with thee, for all thy great profession of him, and near relation to him. When we would sink the reputation of a man the lowest possible, we cannot think of an expression that will do it more effectually, than to say he is such a one as those that are nearest to him, even his own children, dare not trust him, or will not give him a good word. O Christian, ask thyself whether thou couldst be willing to be the unhappy instrument to defame God, and take away his good name in the world; certainly thy heart trembles at the thought of it, if a saint; and if it doth, then surely thy unbelief, by which thou hast done this so oft, will wound thee to the very heart; and, bleeding for what thou hast done, thou wilt beware of taking that sword into thy hand again with which thou hast given so many a wound to the name of God and thy own peace.

Fifthly, If thou wouldst preserve thy faith, labour to increase thy faith. None in more danger of losing what they have, than those poor-spirited men who are

Digitized by Google

content with what they have. A spark is sooner smothered than a flame; a drop is easier drank up and dried than a river. The stronger thy faith is, the safer thy faith is from the enemy's assaults. The intelligence which an enemy hath of a castle being weakly provided for a siege, is enough to bring him against it, which else would not have been troubled with his company. The devil is a coward, and he loves to fight on the greatest advantage, and greater he cannot have than the weakness of the Christian's faith. Didst thou but know, Christian, the many privileges of a strong faith above a weak, thou wouldst never rest till thou hadst it. Strong faith comes conqueror out of those temptations where weak faith is foiled and taken prisoner. Those Philistines could not stand before Samson in his strength who durst dance about him scornfully in his weakness. When David's faith was up, how undauntedly did he look death in the face! 1 Sam. xxx. 6; but when that was out of his heart, O how poor-spirited is he! ready to run his head into every hole, though never so dishonourably, to save himself, 1 Sam. xxi. 13. Strong faith, it frees the Christian from those heart-rending thoughts which weak faith must needs be oppressed with. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee,' Isa. xxvi. 3. So much faith, so much inward peace and quietness. If little faith, then little peace and serenity, through the storms that our unbelieving fears will necessarily gather. If strong faith, then strong peace, for so the repitition in the Hebrew, 'Peace, peace,' imports. It is confessed, weak faith hath as much peace with God through Christ, as the other hath by his strong faith, but not so much bosom peace. Weak faith will as surely land the Christian in heaven as strong faith; for it is impossible the least dram of true grace should perish, being all incorruptible seed; but the weak, doubting Christian is not like to have so pleasant a voyage thither as another with strong faith. Though all in the ship come safe to shore, yet he that is all the way sea-sick hath not so comfortable a voyage as he that is strong and healthful. There are many delightful prospects occur in a journey, which he that is sick and weak loseth the pleasure of; but the strong man views all with abundance of delight; and, though he wisheth with all his heart he was at home, yet the entertainment he hath from these do much shorten and sweeten his way to him. Thus, Christian, there are many previous delights, which saints travelling to heaven meet on their way thither, besides what God hath for them at their journey's end. But it is the Christian whose faith is strong and active on the promise that finds them. This is he who sees those spiritual glories in the promise, that ravish his soul with unspeakable delight, while the doubting Christian's eye of faith is so gummed up with unbelieving fears, that he can see little to affect him in it. This is he that goes singing all the way with the promise in his eye; while the weak Christian (kept in continual pain with his own doubts and jealousies) goes sighing and mourning with a heavy heart, because his interest in the promise is yet under a dispute in his own thoughts. As you would not therefore live uncomfortably, and have a dull, melancholy walk of it to heaven, labour to strengthen your faith.

Quest. But, may be, you will ask, How may I know whether my faith be strong or weak?—*Ans.* I answer, by these following characters.

First, The more entirely a Christian can rely on God, upon his naked word in the promise, the stronger his faith is. He surely putteth greater confidence in a man that will take his own word, or single bond for a sum of money, than he who dares not, except some others will be bound for him. When we trust God for his bare promise, we trust him on his own credit, and this is faith indeed. He that walks without staff or crutch, is stronger than he that needs these to lean on. The promise is the ground faith goes on; sense and reason, these are the crutches which weak faith leans on too much in its acting. Now, soul, inquire, First, Canst thou bear up thyself on the promise, though the crutch of sense and present feeling be not at hand? May be, thou hast had some discoveries of God's love, and beamings forth of his favour upon thee, and so long as the sun shined thus in at the window, thy heart was lightsome, and thou thoughtest thou shouldst never distrust God more, nor listen to thy unbelieving thoughts more; but how findest thou thy heart now, since those sensible demonstrations are withdrawn, and may be some frowning providence sent in the room of them? dost thou presently dispute the promise in thy

Digitized by Google

thoughts, as not knowing whether thou mayest venture to cast anchor on it or no? Because thou hast lost the sense of his love, does thy eye of faith fail thee also, that thou hast lost the sight of his mercy and truth in the promise? Surely the eye of faith is weak, or else it would read the promise without these spectacles. The little child, indeed, thinks the mother is quite lost, if she goes but out of the room where he is; but as it grows older, so he will be wiser, and truly so will the believer also. Christian, bless God for the experiences and sensible tastes thou hast at any time of his love; but know that we cannot judge of our faith, whether weak or strong, by them. Experiences, saith Parisiensis, are like crutches, which do indeed help a lame man to go, but they do not make the lame man sound or strong; food and physic must do that. And therefore, Christian, labour to lean more on the promise, and less on sensible expressions of God's love, whether it be in the present feeling, or past experiences of it. I would not take you off from improving these, but leaning on these, and limiting the actings of our faith to these. A strong man, though he doth not lean on his staff all the way he goes, as the lame man doth on his crutch, which bears his whole weight, yet he may make good use of it now and then to defend himself, when set upon by a thief or dog in his way. Thus the strong Christian may make good use of his experiences, in some temptations, though he doth not lay the weight of his faith upon them, but the promise. Canst thou, secondly, bear thyself upon the promise, when the other crutch of reason breaks under thee, or does thy faith even fall to the ground with it? That is a strong faith, indeed, that can trample upon the improbabilities and impossibilities which reason would be objecting against the performance of the promise, and gives credit to the truth of it with a *nen obstante*. Thus Noah fell hard to work about the ark, upon the credit he gave both to the threatening and promissory part of God's word, and never troubled his head to clear the matter to his reason, how these strange things could come to pass. And it is imputed to the strength of Abraham's faith, that he would not suffer his own narrow reason to have the hearing of the business, when God promised him a Michaelmas spring (as I may so say) a son in his old age: Rom. iv. 19, 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, that was now dead: and skilful swimmers are not afraid to go above their depth; whereas young learners feel for the ground, and are loth to go far from the bank-side. Strong faith fears not, when God carries the creature beyond the depth of his reason: 'We know not what to do,' saith good Jehoshaphat,' 'but our eyes are upon thee,' 2 Chron. xx. As if he had said, We are in a sea of troubles, beyond our own help, or any thought how we can wind out of these straits; but our eyes are upon thee: we dare not give our case for desperate, so long as there is strength in thy arm, tenderness in thy bowels, and truth in thy promise. Whereas weak faith, that is groping for some footing for reason to stand on, it is taken up, how to reconcile the promise and the creature's understanding; hence those many questions which drop from its mouth. When Christ said, 'Give ye them to eat,' Mark vi., his disciples ask him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread?' as if Christ's bare word could not spare that cost and trouble. 'Whereby shall I know this,' saith Zacharias to the angel, 'for I am an old man?' Luke i. Alas! his faith was not strong enough to digest, at present, this strange news.

Secondly, The more composed and contented the heart is under the changes which Providence brings upon the Christian's state and condition in the world, the stronger his faith is. Weak bodies cannot bear change of weather so well as healthful and strong do; hot and cold, fair or foul, cause no great alteration in the strong man's temper: but, alas! the other is laid up by them, or at best goes complaining of them. Thus strong faith can live in any climate, travel in all weather, and fadge with any condition. 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content,' saith Paul, Phil. iv. 11. Alas! all Christ's scholars are not of Paul's form; weak faith hath not yet got the mastery of this hard lesson. When God turns thy health into sickness, thy abundance into penury, thy honour into scorn and contempt, in what language dost thou now make thy condition known to God! Is thy spirit embittered into discontent, which thou ventest in murmuring complaints? or art thou well satisfied with God's dealings, so as to acquiesce cheerfully in thy present portion, not from an insensibleness

Digitized by Google

of the affliction, but approbation of divine appointment? If the latter, thy faith is strong. First, It shews God hath a throne in thy heart; thou reverencest his authority, and ownest his sovereignty, or else thou wouldst not acquiesce in his orders. 'I was dumb because thou didst it,' Psa. xxxix. 9. If the blow had come from any other hand, he could not have taken it so silently. When the servant strikes the child, he runs to his father and makes his complaint; but though the father doth more to him, he complains not of his father, nor seeks redress from any other; because it is his father, whose authority he reveres. Thus thou comportest thyself towards God, and what but a strong faith can enable thee? 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Psa. xlvi. 11. We must know God believingly to be what he is, before our hearts will be still. Secondly, This acquiescence of spirit, under the disposition of Providence, shews that thou dost not only stand in awe of his sovereignty, but hast aimable, comfortable thoughts of his mercy and goodness in Christ. Thou believest he can soon, and certainly will make thee amends, or else thou couldst not so easily part with these enjoyments. The child goes willingly to bed, when others, may be, are going to supper at a great feast in the family; but the mother promiseth the child to save something for him against the morning: this the child believes, and is content. Surely thou hast something in the eye of thy faith which will recompense all thy present loss, and this makes thee fast so willingly when others feast; be sick when others are well. Paul tells us why he and his brethren in affliction did not faint, 2 Cor. xiv. 16. They saw heaven coming to them, while earth was going from them. 'For which cause we faint not,—— for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

Thirdly, The more able to wait long for answers to our desires and prayers, the stronger faith is. It shews the tradesman to be poor and needy when he must have ready money for what he sells. They that are forehanded are willing to give time, and able to forbear long. Weak faith is all for the present; if it hath not presently its desires answered, then it grows jealous, lays down sad conclusions against itself—his prayer was not heard, or he is not one God loves, and the like; much ado to be kept out of a fainting fit. 'I said in my haste, All men are liars;' but strong faith, that can trade with God for time, yea, wait God's leisure; 'He that believes makes not haste,' Isa. xxviii. 16. He knows his money is in a good hand, and he is not over-quick to call for it home, knowing well that the longest voyages have the richest returns. As rich ground can do without rain longer than lean or sandy, which must have a shower ever and anon, or the corn on it fades; or as a strong healthful man can fast longer without faintness than the sickly and weak; so the Christian of strong faith can stay longer for spiritual refreshing from the presence of the Lord, in the returns of his mercy, and discoveries of his love to him, than one of weak faith.

Fourthly, The more the Christian can lose or suffer upon the credit of the promise, the stronger his faith is. If you should see a man part with a fair inheritance, and leave his kindred and country, where he might pass his days in the embracements of his dear friends, and the delicious fare which a plentiful estate would afford him every day, to follow a friend to the other end of the world, with hunger and hardship, through sea and land, and a thousand perils that meet him on every hand, you would say that this man had a strong confidence in his friend, and a dear love to him, would you not? Nay, if he should do all this for a friend whom he never saw, upon the bare credit of a letter which he sends to invite him to come over to him, with a promise of great things that he would do for him, now, to throw all his present possessions and enjoyments at his heels, and willingly put himself into the condition of a poor pilgrim and traveller, (with the loss of all he hath), that he may come to his dear friend, this adds to the wonder of his confidence. Such gallant spirits we read of, 1. Pet. i. 6—8: 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice,' &c. Observe the place, and you shall find them in sorrowful plight,' in heaviness through manifold temptations;' yet, because their way lies through the sloughs to the enjoyment of God and Christ (whom they never saw or knew, but by the report the word makes of them), they can turn their back on the world's friendships and enjoyments,

Digitized by Google

with which it courted them as well as others, and go with a merry heart through the deepest of them all: here is glorious faith indeed! It is not praising of heaven, and wishing we were there, but a cheerful abandoning the dearest pleasures, and embracing the greatest sufferings of the world (when called to the same), will evidence our faith to be both true and strong.

Fifthly, The more easily that the Christian can repel motions, and resist temptations to sin, the stronger is his faith. The snare or net which holds the little fish fast, the greater and stronger fish easily breaks through. The Christian's faith is strong or weak, as he finds it easy or hard to break from temptations to sin. When an ordinary temptation holds thee by the heel, and thou art entangled in it, like a fly in a spider's web, much ado to get off and persuade thy heart from yielding; truly it speaks faith very feeble; to have no strength to oppose the assaults of sin and lust, speaks the heart void of faith. Where faith hath not a hand to prostrate an enemy, it yet hath a hand to lift up against it, and a voice to cry out for help to heaven; some way or other, faith will shew its dislike, and enter its protest against sin; and to have little strength to resist evidenceth a weak faith. Peter's faith was weak, when a maid's voice dashed him out of countenance; but it was well amended, when he could withstand, and with a noble constancy disdain threats of a whole council, Acts xiv. 17. Christian, compare thyself with thyself, and give righteous judgment on thyself: do thy lusts as powerfully inveigle thy heart, and carry it away from God, as they did some months or years ago? or canst thou in truth say, thy heart is got above them; since thou hast known more of Christ, and had a view of his spiritual glories, thou canst now pass by their door and not look in; yea, when they knock at thy door in a temptation, thou canst shut it upon them, and disdain the motion? Surely thou mayest know thy faith is grown stronger. When we see that the clothes, which a year or two ago were even fit for the person, will not now come on him, they are so little, we may easily be persuaded to believe the person is much grown since that time. If thy faith were no more grown, those temptations which fitted thee then would like thee as well now; find but the power of sin die, and thou mayest know that faith is more lively and vigorous. The harder the blow, the stronger the arm is that gives it. A child cannot strike such a blow as a man. Weak faith cannot give such a home blow to sin as a strong faith can.

Sixthly, The more ingenuity and love is in thy obediential walking, the stronger thy faith is. Faith works by love, and therefore its strength or weakness may be discovered by the strength or weakness of that love it puts forth in the Christian's actings. The strength of a man's arm, that draws a bow, is seen by the force the arrow which he shoots flies with. And certainly, the strength of our faith may be known by the force that our love mounts to God with. It is impossible that weak faith (which is unable to draw the promise as a strong faith can) should leave such a forcible impression on the heart to love God, as the stronger faith doth. If, therefore, thy heart be strongly carried out from love to God, to abandon sin, perform duty, and exert acts of obedience to his command; know thy place, and take it with humble thankfulness, thou art a graduate in the art of believing. The Christian's love advanceth by equal paces with his faith, as the heat of the day increaseth with the climbing sun; the higher that mounts towards its meridian, the hotter the day grows; so, the higher faith lifts Christ up in the Christian, the more intense his love to Christ grows, which now sets him on work after another sort than he was wont. Before when he was to mourn for his sins, he was acted by a slavish fear, and made an ugly face at the work, as one doth that drinks some unpleasing potion; but now acts of repentance are not distasteful and formidable, since faith hath discovered mercy to sit on justice's brow, and undeceived the creature of those false and cruel thoughts of God, which ignorantly he had taken up concerning him. He doth not now hate the word 'repentance,' (as Luther said he once did, before he understood that place, Rom. i. 17,) but goes about the work with amiable, sweet apprehensions of a good God, that stands ready with the sponge of his mercy, dipped in Christ's blood, to blot out his sins as fast as he scores them up by his humble, sorrowful confession of them. And the same might be said concerning all other offices of Christian piety. Strong faith makes the soul ingenuous: it doth not pay the performance of any duty, as an oppressed

Digitized by Google

subject doth a heavy tax, with a deep sigh, to think how much he parts with, but as freely as a child would present his father with an apple of that orchard which he holds by gift from him; indeed, the child, when young, is very servile and selfish, forbearing what his father forbids for fear of the rod, and doing what he commands for some fine thing or other that his father bribes him with, more than for pure love to his person, or obedience to his will and pleasure: but as he grows up, and comes to understand himself better, and the relation he stands in, with the many obligations of it to filial obedience, then his servility and selfishness wear off, and his natural affection will prevail more with him to please his father, than any other argument whatever. And so will it with the Christian, where faith is of any growth and ripeness.

Seventhly, to name no more, The more able faith is to sweeten the thoughts of death, and make it desirable to the Christian, the stronger his faith. Things that are very sharp or sour, will take much sugar to make them sweet. Death is one of those things, which hath the most ungrateful taste to the creature's palate that can be. O it requires a strong faith to make the serious thoughts of it sweet and desirable. I know some, in a pet and passion, have professed great desires of dying; but it hath been as a sick man desires to change his place, merely out of a weariness of, and discontent with his present condition, without any due consideration of what they desire. But a soul that knows the consequences of death, and the unchangeableness of that state (whether of bliss or misery) that it certainly marries us to, will never cheerfully call for death in his cordial desires, till he be in some measure resolved from the promise, what entertainment he may expect from God when he comes into that other world; and that a weak faith will not do, without abundance of fears and doubts. I confess, that sometimes a Christian of very weak faith may meet death with as little fear upon his spirit, yea, more joy, than one of a far stronger faith, when he is helped up by the chin, by some extraordinary comfort poured into his soul from God immediately; which should God withdraw, his fears would return upon him, and he feel again his faintings, as a sick man that hath been strangely cheered with a strong cordial does his feebleness, when the efficacy of it is spent; but we speak of the ordinary way in which Christians come to have their hearts raised above the fear, yea, into a strong desire of death, and that is by attaining to a strong faith. God can indeed make a feast of a few loaves, and multiply the weak Christian's little faith on a sudden, as he lies on a sick bed, into a spread table of all varieties of consolations; but I fear God will not do this miracle for that man or woman, who upon the expectation of this, contents himself with the little provision of faith he hath, and labours not to increase his store against that spending-time.

CHAPTER XI.

SHEWETH, IT IS THE DUTY OF A CHRISTIAN TO OWN THE GRACE OF GOD IN HIM, AND NOT DENY IT; WITH THE RESOLUTION OF SOME SCRUPLES WITH WHICH WEAK SAINTS DISPUTE AGAINST THE TRUTH OF THEIR OWN FAITH.

SECONDLY, We come to the second word of exhortation we have to speak to the saints. If faith be such a choice grace, and thou hast it, deny not what God hath done for thee. Which is worst, thinkest thou, the sinner to hide and deny his sin, or the Christian to hide and deny his faith? I confess the first does worst, if we look to the intention of the persons; for the sinner hides his sin out of a wicked end, and the doubting soul means well; he is afraid to play the hypocrite, and be found a liar in saying he hath, what he fears he hath not: but if we consider the consequence of the Christian's disowning the grace of God in him, and what use the devil makes of it, for the leading him into many other sins, it will not be so easy to resolve whose sin is the greatest. Good Joseph meant piously, when he had thoughts of putting away secretly his espoused Mary (thinking no other, but that she had played the whore), and yet, it would have been a sad act, if he had persisted in his thoughts; especially after the angel had told him that which was conceived in her to be of the Holy Ghost. Thus thou, poor mourning soul, may be, art thinking to put away thy faith, as some by-blow of Satan, and base-born counterfeit grace, begot on thy hypocritical heart by the father of lies. Well, take heed what

Digitized by Google

thou dost; hast thou had no vision, not extraordinary, of an angel, or immediate revelation, but ordinary, of the Spirit of God, I mean, in his word and ordinances, encouraging thee from those characters which are in the Scripture given of faith, and the conformity thy faith hath to them, to take and own thy faith, as that which is conceived in thee by the Holy Ghost, and not a brat formed by the delusion of Satan in the womb of thy own groundless imagination? If so, be afraid of bearing false witness against the grace of God in thee. As there is that makes himself rich in faith, that hath nothing of this grace, so there is that maketh himself poor, that hath great store of this riches. Let us therefore hear what are the grounds of this thy suspicion, that we may see whether thy fears or thy faith be imaginary and false.

Object. First, Saith the poor soul, I am afraid I have no true faith, because I have not those joys and consolations which others have who believe. *Ans.* First, Thou mayest have inward peace, though not joy; the day may be still and calm, though not glorious and sunshine; though the Comforter be not come with his ravishing consolation, yet he may have hushed the storm of thy troubled spirit; and true peace as well as joy is the consequent of faith unfeigned. Secondly, Suppose thou hast not yet attained so much as to this inward peace, yet know thou hast no reason to question the truth of thy faith for want of this. We have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves. The pardon may be passed the prince's hand and seal, and yet not put into the prisoner's hand. Thou thinkest them too rash, dost not, who judged Paul a murderer by the viper that fastened on his hand? And what art thou, who condemnest thyself for an unbeliever, because of those troubles and inward agonies which may fasten for a time on the spirit of the most gracious child God hath on earth?

Object. Secondly, But can there be any true faith where there is so much doubting as I find in myself? *Ans.* There is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth to the least degree of faith. Our blessed Saviour tells them what wonders they shall do if they believe and doubt not, Matt. xxi. 21; and Luke xvii. 6, he tells his disciples, 'if they have faith as a grain of mustard-seed,' they shall do as much. That which is a faith without doubting in Matthew is faith as a grain of mustard-seed in Luke. But again there is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth not to the truth of faith, but the strength of faith: Matt. xiv. 31, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' They are the words of Christ to sinking Peter, in which he so chides his doubting, as yet to acknowledge the truth of his faith, though weak. All doubting is evil in its nature; yet some doubting, though evil in itself, doth evidence some grace that is good to be in the person so doubting; as smoke proves some fire, and peevishness and pettishness in a sick person, that before lay senseless is a good sign of some mending, though itself a thing bad enough. But the thing here desirable, I conceive, would be to give some help to the doubting soul, that he may know what his doubting is symptomatical of, whether of true faith, though weak, or of no faith. Now for this I shall lay down four characters of those doubtings which accompany true faith.

First, The doubtings of a true believer are attended with much shame and sorrow of spirit, even for these doubtings. I appeal to thy conscience, poor doubting soul, whether the consideration of this one sin doth not cost thee many a salt tear, and heavy sigh, which others know not of? Now I pray from whence come these? Will unbelief mourn for unbelief? or sin put itself to shame? No sure, it shows there is a principle of faith in the soul, that takes God's part, and cannot see his promises and name wronged by unbelief without protesting against it, and mourning under it, though the hands of this grace be too weak at present to drive the enemy out of the soul. Deut. xxii. 27, the law cleared the damsel that 'cried out in the field;' and so will the gospel thee, who sincerly mournest for thy unbelief. That holy man, whoever he was, Psa. lxxvii., was far gone in this doubting disease. How many times do we find his unbelief putting the mercy and faithfulness of God (which should be beyond all dispute in our hearts) to the question and dubious vote in his distempered soul! He might with as much reason have asked his soul whether there was a God, as whether his mercy was clean gone, and his promise fail; yet so far did his fears in this hurry carry him aside; but at last you have

Digitized by Google

him acknowledging his folly, ver. 10, 'And I said, This is my infirmity.' This I may thank thee for, O my unbelief, thou enemy of God and my soul: thou wilt be puzzling me with needless fears, and make me think and speak so unworthily of my God. This proved there was faith at the bottom of his unbelief.

Secondly, The doubtings of a sincere believer are accompanied with ardent desires after those things which it most calls in question and doubts of. The weak believer, he questions whether God loves him or no, but he desires it more than life; and this is the language of a gracious soul, Psa. lxiii. 3: 'Thy loving-kindness is better than life.' He doubts whether Christ be his: yet if you should ask him what value he sets upon Christ, and what he would give for Christ, he can tell you, and that truly, that no price should be too great if he were to be bought: no condition that God offers Christ upon appears to him hard, but all easy and cheap. And this is the judgment which only the believing soul can have of Christ. 'Unto you therefore which believe he is precious,' 1 Pet. ii. 7. In a word, he doubts whether he be truly holy or only counterfeit, but his soul pants and thrists after those graces most which he can see least: he to him should be the more welcome messenger, that brings him the news of a broken heart, than another that tells him of a whole crown and kingdom fallen to him. He disputes every duty and action he doth, whether it be according to the rule of the word; and yet he passionately desires that he could walk without one wry step from it: and doth not quarrel with the word because it is so strict, but with his heart, because it is so loose; and how great a testimony these give of a gracious frame of heart, see Psalm cxix. 20, 140, where David brings these as the evidence of his grace. Canst thou, therefore, poor soul, let out thy heart strongly after Christ and his graces, while thou dost not see thy interest in either? Be of good cheer, thou art not so great a stranger with these as thou thinkest thyself; these strong desires are the consequent of some taste thou hast had of them already; and these doubts may proceed, not from an absolute want, as if thou wert wholly destitute of them, but the violence of thy desires, which are not satisfied with what thou hast. It is very ordinary for excessive love to beget excessive fears, and those groundless. The wife, because she loves her husband dearly, fears when he is abroad she shall never see him more; one while she thinks he is sick, another while killed, and thus her love torments her without any just cause, when her husband is all the while well, and on his way home. A jewel of great price, or ring that we highly value, if but laid out of sight, the extreme estimate we set on them makes us presently think them lost. It is the nature of passions in this our imperfect state, when strong and violent, to disturb our reason, and hide things from our eye, which else were easy to be seen. Thus many poor doubting souls are looking and hunting to find that faith which they have already in their bosoms, being hid from them merely by the vehemence of their desire of it and fear they should be cheated with a false one for a true; as the damsel opened not the door for gladness to Peter, Acts. xii. 14. Her joy made her forget what she did; so the high value the poor doubting Christian sets on faith, together with an excess of longing after it, suffers him not to entertain so high an opinion of himself as to think he at present hath that jewel in his bosom which he so infinitely prizeth.

Thirdly, The doubtings of a truly believing soul make him more inquisitive how he may get what he sometimes fears he hath not. Many sad thoughts pass to and fro in his soul, whether Christ be his or no, whether he may lay claim to the promise or no; and these cause such a commotion in his spirit, that he cannot rest till he come to some resolution in his own thoughts from the word concerning this great case; therefore as Ahasuerus, when he could not sleep, called for the records and chronicles of his kingdom, so the doubting soul betakes himself to the records of heaven, the word of God in the scripture, and one while he is reading there, another while looking into his own heart, if he can find there anything that answers the characters of Scripture-faith, as the face in the glass doth the face of man. David, Psa. lxxvii., when he was at a loss what to think of himself and many doubts did clog his faith, insomuch that the thinking of God increased his trouble, he did not sit down and let the ship drive, as we say, not regarding whether God loved him or no, but 'communes with his own heart, and his spirit makes diligent search:' thus it is

Digitized by Google

with every sincere soul under doubtings; he dares no more sit down contented in that unresolved condition, than one who thinks he smells fire in his house dares settle himself to sleep till he hath looked in every room and corner, and satisfied himself that all is safe, lest he should be waked with the fire about his ears in the night; and the poor doubting soul much more afraid, lest it should wake with hell-fire about it; whereas a soul in a state and under the power of unbelief, is secure and careless. The old world did not believe the threatening of the flood, and they spent no thoughts about the matter; it is at their doors and windows before they had used any means how to escape it.

Fourthly, In the midst of the true believer's doubtings, there is a leaning of his heart on Christ, and a secret purpose still to cleave to him. At the same time that Peter's feet were sinking into the waters, he was lifting up a prayer to Christ, and this proved the truth of his faith, as the other its weakness. So Jonah, he had many fears, and sometimes so predominant, that as bad humours settle into a sore, so they gathered into a hasty unbelieving conclusion; yet then his faith had some little secret hold on God, Jonah ii. 4: 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.' And verse 7: 'When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord.' Holy David also, though he could not rid his soul of all those fears which got into it through his weak faith, as water into a leaking ship, yet he hath his hand at the pump, and takes up a firm resolution against them, Psa. lvi. 3: 'At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' The doubting Christian sinks, but as a traveller in a slough, where the bottom is firm, and so recovers himself; but the unbeliever sinks in his fears as a man in a quicksand, lower and lower till he be swallowed up into dispair. The weak Christian's doubting is like the wavering of a ship at anchor; he is moved, yet not removed from his hold on Christ; but the unbeliever's, like the wavering of a wave, which having nothing to stay it it, is wholly at the mercy of the wind, James i. 6: 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.'

Object. Thirdly, O but, saith another, I fear mine is a presumptuous faith, and if so, to be sure it cannot be right. *Ans.* For the removal of this objection, I shall lay down three characters of a presumptuous faith.

First, A presumptuous faith, it is an easy faith; it hath no enemy of Satan, or our own corrupt hearts to oppose it, and so, like a stinking weed, shoots up and grows rank on a sudden. The devil never hath a sinner surer, than when dreaming in his fool's paradise, and walking in his sleep, amidst his vain phantastical hopes of Christ and salvation. And therefore he is so far from waking him, that he draws the curtains close about him, that no light nor noise in his conscience may break his rest. Did you ever know the thief call him up in the night, whom he meant to rob and kill? No, sleep is his advantage. But true faith he is a sworn enemy against; he persecutes it in the very cradle, as Herod did Christ in the manger; he pours a flood of wrath after it, as soon as it betrays its own birth, by crying and lamenting after the Lord. If thy faith be legitimate, Naphtali may be its name; and thou mayest say, With great 'wrestlings have I wrestled' with Satan and my own base heart, and at last have prevailed. You know the answer that Rebecca had, when she inquired of God about the scuffle and striving of the children in her womb. Two nations, God told her, were in her womb. If thou canst find the like strife in thy soul, thou mayest comfort thyself, that it is from two contrary principles, faith and unbelief, which are lusting one against another; and thy unbelief which is the elder (however now it strives for the mastery), shall serve faith the younger.

Secondly, Presumptuous faith is lame of one hand; it hath a hand to receive pardon and heaven from God, but no hand to give up itself to God: true faith hath the use of both her hands. 'My beloved is mine,' there the soul takes Christ; and I am his,' there she surrenders herself to the use and service of Christ. Now didst thou ever pass over thyself freely to Christ? I know none but will profess they do this. But the presumptuous soul, like Ananias, lies to the Holy Ghost, by keeping back part, yea, the chief part of that he promised to lay at Christ's feet. This lust he sends out of the way, when he should deliver it up to justice; and that creature-enjoyment he twines about, and cannot persuade his heart to trust God with the disposure of it, but cries out when the

Digitized by Google

Lord calls for it, Benjamin shall not go; his life is bound up in it, and if God will have it from him, he must take it by force, for there is no hope of gaining his consent. If this is the true picture of thy faith, and temper of thy soul, then verily thou blessest thyself in an idol, and mistakest a bold face for a believing heart; but if thou art as willing to be faithful to Christ, as to pitch thy faith on Christ; if thou countest it as a great privilege, that Christ should have a throne in thy heart and love, as that thou shouldst have a place and room in his mercy; in a word, if thou art plain-hearted, and wouldst not hide a sin, nor lock up a creature-enjoyment from him, but desirest freely to give up thy dearest lust to the gibbet, and thy sweetest enjoyments, to stay with, or go from thee, as thy God thinks fit to allow thee, though all this be with much regret and discontent, from a malignant party of the flesh within thee, thou provest thyself a sound believer. And the devil may as well say that himself believeth, as thou presumest; if this be to presume, be thou yet more presumptuous. Let the devil nick-name thee and thy faith as he pleaseth: the rose-water is not the less sweet, because one writes wormwood-water on the glass. The Lord knows who are his, and will own them for his true children, and their graces for the sweet fruits of his Spirit, though a false title be set on them by Satan and the world, yea, sometimes by believers on themselves. The father will not deny his child, because he is in a violent fit of a fever, talks idle, and denies him to be his father.

Thirdly, The presumptuous faith is a sapless and unsavoury faith. When an unsound heart pretends to greatest faith on Christ, even then it finds little savour, tastes little sweetness in Christ. No, he hath his old tooth in his head, which makes him relish still the gross food of sensual enjoyments above Christ and his spiritual dainties; would he but freely speak what he thinks, he must confess, that if he were put to his choice, whether he would sit with Christ and his children, to be entertained with the pleasures that they enjoy, from spiritual communion with him in his promises, ordinances, and holy ways; or had rather sit with the servants and have the scraps, while God allows the men of the world their full bags and bellies of carnal treasure; that he would prefer the latter before the former. He brags of his interest in God, but he cares not how little he is in the presence of God in any duty or ordinance; certainly, if he were such a favourite as he speaks, he would be more at court than he is. He hopes to be saved, he saith, but he draws not his wine of joy at his tap; it is not the thoughts of heaven that comfort him, but what he hath in the world, and of the world, these maintain his joy; when the world's vessel is out, and creature-joy spent, alas! the poor wretch can find little relief from, or relish in his pretended hopes of heaven, and interest in Christ, but he is still whining after the other. Whereas true faith alters the very creature's palate; no feast so sweet to the believer as Christ is; let God take all other dishes off the board, and leave but Christ, he counts his feast is not gone, he hath what he likes; but let all else stand, health, estate, friends, and what else the world sets a high value on, if Christ be withdrawn, he soon misseth his dish, and makes his moan, and saith, Alas! who hath taken away my Lord? It is Christ that seasons these and all his enjoyments, and makes them savoury meat to his palate; but without him, they have no more taste than the white of an egg without salt.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SAINT'S ENEMY DESCRIBED, WITH HIS WARLIKE PROVISION, FIERY DARTS, AND WHAT THEY ARE.

We have done with the exhortation; and now come to the second general part of the verse, *i. e.*, a powerful argument pressing this exhortation, contained in these words: 'Whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.' 'Ye shall be able,' not an uncertain may be ye shall; but he is peremptory and absolute; 'Ye shall be able;' but what to do? 'able to quench,' not only to resist and repel, but to quench; but what shall they quench? not ordinary temptations only, but the worst arrows the devil hath in his quiver, 'fiery darts,' and not some few of them, but 'all the fiery darts of the wicked.'

In this second general, there are these two particulars.

Digitized by Google

First, The saint's enemy described. Secondly, The power and puissance of faith over this enemy. First, of the first.

First, The saint's enemy described, that in three particulars. First, In its nature, 'wicked.' Secondly, In their unity, 'wicked,' or wicked one, in the singular number. Thirdly, Their warlike furniture and provision, with which they take the field against the saints, darts, and they fiery. First, Here is the saint's enemy described by their nature, 'wicked.' Something I have said of this, verse 12, where Satan is called 'spiritual wickednesses;' I shall at present, therefore, pass it over with the lighter hand. Certainly there is some special lesson that God would have his people learn even from this attribute of the devil and his limbs (for the whole pack of devils, and devilish men are here intended), that they are represented to the saint's consideration by this name so oft as 'wicked.' I shall content myself with two ends that I conceive God principally aims at by this name; first they are called wicked as an odious name, whereby God would raise his people's stomach's to a loathing of them, yea, provoke their pure souls to the greatest hatred of them, and especially of sin, that makes them so odious.

First, They are called wicked, as an odious name, whereby God would raise his children's stomachs into a loathing of sin above all things in the world, and provoke their pure souls as to hatred and detestation of all sin, so a vigorous resistance of the devil and his instruments, as such who are wicked; which is a name that makes him detestable above any other. God would have us know, that when he himself would speak the worst he can of the devil, he can think of no name for the purpose like this, to say he is the 'wicked one.' The name which exalts God highest, and is the very excellency of all his other excellences is, that he is 'the Holy One,' and 'none holy as the Lord.' This therefore gives the devil the blackest brand of infamy, that he is the wicked one, and none wicked to that height besides himself. Could holiness be separated from any other of God's attributes (which is the height of blasphemy to think), the glory of them would be departed. And could the devil's wickedness be removed from his torments and misery, the case would be exceedingly altered; we ought then to pity him whom now we must no less than hate and abominate with a perfect hatred. First, Consider this all ye who live in sin, and blush not to be seen in the practise of it. O that you would behold your faces in this glass, and you should see whom you look like; truly no other than the devil himself, and in that which makes him most odious, which is his wickedness. Never more spit at the name of the devil, nor seem to be scared at any ill-shapen picture of him, for thou carriest a far more ugly one, and the truest of him that is possible, in thy own wicked bosom. The more wicked, the more like the devil; who can draw the devil's picture like himself? If thou art a wicked wretch, thou art of the devil himself. Cain, as it is said, 'was of that wicked one,' 1 John iii. 12. Every sin thou committest is a new line that the devil draws on thy soul. And if the image of God in a saint, which the Spirit of God is drawing for many years together in a saint, will be so curious a piece when the last line shall be drawn in heaven, O think then how frightful and horrid a creature thou wilt appear to be when, after all the devil's pains here on earth to imprint his image upon thee, thou shalt see thyself in hell, as wicked to the full as a wicked devil can make thee. Secondly, Consider this, O ye saints, and bestow, first, your pity on those poor forlorn souls that are under the power of a wicked devil. It is a lamentable judgment to live under a wicked government, though it be but of men; for a servant in a family to be under a wicked master, is a heavy plague; David reckons it among other great curses, Psalm cix. 6, 'Set a wicked man over him: O what is it then to have a wicked spirit over him! He would show himself very kind to his friend that should wish him to be the worst slave in Turkey, rather than the best servant of sin and Satan. And yet see the folly of men. Solomon tells us, 'When the wicked bear rule, the people mourn,' Prov. ix. 2. But when a wicked devil rules, poor besotted sinners laugh and are merry. Well, you who are not out of your wits so far, but know sin's service to be the creature's utmost misery, mourn for them that go themselves laughing to sin, and by sin to hell. And, secondly, let it fill thy heart, Christian, with zeal and indignation against Satan in all his temptations; remember he is wicked, and he can come for no good; thou knowest the

Digitized by Google

happiness of serving a holy God, surely then thou hast an answer ready by thee against this wicked one comes to draw thee to sin. Canst thou think of fouling thy hands about his base, nasty drudgery, after they have been used to so pure and fine work as the service of thy God is? Listen not to Satan's motions, except thou hast a mind to be wicked. Secondly, They are called wicked as a name of contempt, for the encouragement of all believers in their combat with them: as if God had said, Fear them not, they are a wicked company you go against; cause, and they who defend it, both wicked. And truly, if the saints must have enemies, the worse they are the better it is. It would put mettle into a coward to fight with such a crew. Wickedness must needs be weak; the devil's guilt in their own bosoms tells them their cause is lost before the battle is fought. They fear thee, Christian, because thou art holy, and therefore thou needst not be dismayed at them who are wicked. Thou lookest on them as subtle, mighty, and many, and then thy heart fails thee; but look on all these subtile, mighty, spirits as wicked, ungodly wretches, that hate God more than thee, yea, thee for thy kindred to him, and thou canst not but take heart. Whose side is God on, that thou art afraid? Will he that rebuked kings for touching his anointed ones, and doing them harm in their bodies and estates, stand still, thinkest thou, and suffer these wicked spirits to attempt the life of God himself in thee, thy grace, thy holiness, without coming into thy help? it is impossible.

Secondly, The saints' enemy is set out by their unity; fiery darts of the wicked, 'of the wicked one;' as if all were shot out of the same bow and by the same hand; as if Christian's fight were a single duel with one single enemy. All the legions of devils, and multitudes of wicked men and women, make but one great enemy; they are all one mystical body of wickedness, as Christ and his saints one mystical holy body. One spirit acts Christ and his saints; so one spirit acts devils, and ungodly men his limbs; the soul is in the little toe, and the spirit of the devil in the least of sinners. But I have spoke something of this subject elsewhere.

Thirdly, The saints' enemy is here described by his warlike provision, or weapons he useth in fight against them: 'darts,' and those of the worst kind, 'fiery darts.'

First, Darts. The devil's temptations are the darts he useth against the souls of men and women, and may fitly be so called in a threefold respect. First, Darts, or arrows, they are swift; thence is our usual expression, 'As swift as an arrow out of a bow.' Lightning is called God's arrow, because it flies swiftly, Psalm xviii. 14: 'He sent out his arrows and scattered them; he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them;' that is, lightning like arrows. Satan's temptations fly like a flash of lightning, not long of coming. He needs no more time than the cast of an eye for the dispatch of a temptation. David's eye did but unawares fall upon Bathsheba, and the devil's arrow was in his heart before he could shut this casement. Or the hearing of a word or two: thus when David's servants had told what Nabal, the churl, said, David's choler was presently up; an arrow of revenge wounded him to the heart. What quicker than a thought? yet how often is that a temptation to us; one silly thought riseth in a duty, and our hearts, before intent upon the work, are on a sudden carried away, like a spaniel after a bird that springs up before him as he goes after his master; yea, if one temptation speeds not, how soon can he send another after it! as quick as the nimblest archer; no sooner than one arrow is delivered, but he hath another on the string. Secondly, Darts or arrows fly secretly, and so do temptations. First, The arrow often comes afar off; a man may be wounded with a dart, and not see who shot it. The wicked are said to 'shoot their arrows in secret at the perfect,' Psalm lxiv. 4; and then 'they say, Who shall see them,' verse 4. Thus Satan lets fly a temptation so secretly that he is hardly suspected in the thing. Sometimes he useth a wife's tongue to do his errand; another while he gets behind the back of a husband, friend, servant, &c., and is not seen all the while he is doing his work. Who would have thought to have found a devil in Peter tempting his Master, or suspected that Abraham should be his instrument to betray his beloved wife into the hands of a sin? yet it was so. Nay, sometimes he is so secret that he borrows God's bow to shoot his arrows from, and the poor Christian is abused, thinking it is God chides and is angry, when it is the devil that tempts him to think so, and only counterfeits

Digitized by Google

God's voice. Job cries out, 'The arrows of the Almighty!' how the poison of them drank up his spirit, and of the terrors of God that did set themselves in array against him, Job vi. 4; when it was Satan all the while that was practising his malice and playing his pranks upon him. God was friend with this good man, only Satan begged leave, and God gave it for a time, thus to affright him; and poor Job cries out, as if God had cast him off, and were become his enemy. Secondly, Darts or arrows, they make little or no noise as they go; they cut their passage through the air without telling us by any crack or report, as the cannon doth, that they are coming: thus insensibly doth temptation make its approach, the thief is in before we think of any need to shut the doors. The wind is a creature secret in its motion, of which our Saviour saith, 'We know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes,' John iii. 8; yet 'we hear the sound thereof,' as our Saviour saith in the same place: but temptations many times come, and give us no warning by any sound they make. The devil lays his plot so close, that the soul sees not his drift, observes not his hook till he finds it in his belly; as the woman of Tekoa told her tale so handsomely that the king passeth judgment against himself in the person of another before he smelt out the business. Thirdly, Darts have a wounding, killing nature, especially when well-headed, and shot out of a strong bow by one that is able to draw it; such are Satan's temptations, headed with desperate malice, and drawn by a strength no less than angelical; and this against so weak a creature as man, that it were impossible, had not God provided good armour for our soul, to outstand Satan's power and get safe to heaven. Christ would have us sensible of their force and danger, by that petition in his prayer, which the best of saints on this side of heaven have need to use: 'Lead us not into temptation.' Christ was then but newly out of the list, where he had tasted Satan's tempting skill and strength, which though beneath his wisdom and power to defeat, yet well he know, it was able to worst the strongest of saints. There was never any besides Christ that Satan did not foil more or less; it was Christ's prerogative to be tempted, but not led into temptation. Job, one of the chief worthies in God's army of saints, who from God's mouth is a none-such; yet was galled by these arrows shot from Satan's bow, and put to great disorder. God was fain to pluck him out of the devil's gripe, or else he had been quite worried by that lion.

Secondly, Satan's warlike provision is, not only darts, but fiery darts. Some restrain these fiery darts to some particular kind of temptation, as despair, blasphemy, and those which fill the heart with terror and horror; but this, I conceive, is too strait, because faith is a shield for all kind of temptations, and indeed there is none but may prove a fiery temptation; so that I should rather incline to think all sorts of temptations to be comprehended here, yet so as to respect some in an especial manner more than others, which after shall be instanced in.

Quest. Why are Satan's darts called fiery ones?—*Ans.* First, They may be said to be fiery, in regard of that fiery wrath with which Satan shoots them; they are the fire this dragon spits, full of indignation against God and his saints. Saul, it is said, 'breathed out threatening and slaughter against the church,' Acts ix. 1. As one that is inwardly inflamed, his breath is hot, a fiery stream of persecuting wrath came as out of a burning furnace from him; temptations are the breathings of the devil's wrath. Secondly, Fiery in regard of the end they lead to, if not quenched, and that is hell-fire; there is a spark of hell in every temptation. As all sparks fly to their element, so all temptations tend to hell and damnation, according to Satan's intent and purpose. Thirdly, and chiefly, Fiery, in regard of that malignant effect they have on the spirits of men, and that is, to enkindle a fire in the heart and conscience of poor creatures: the apostle alludes to the custom of cruel enemies, who used to dip the heads of their arrows in some poison, whereby they became more deadly, and did not only wound the part where they light, but inflame the whole body, which made the cure more difficult. Job speaks of 'the poison of them which drank up his spirits,' Job vi. 4. They have an envenoming and inflaming quality.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIERY NATURE OF SATAN'S ENTICING TEMPTATIONS, WITH FAITH'S POWER TO QUENCH THEM.

THEY are of two sorts, either those that do pleasingly entice and bewitch with some seeming promises of satisfaction to the creature; or, Secondly, Such as affright and carry horror with them. Both are fiery, and quenched by faith, and only faith. We shall begin with the first, such as do pleasingly entice. And the note is this:

Doct. That faith will enable a soul to quench the fire of Satan's most pleasing temptations. First, We shall shew you, that these enticing temptations have a fiery quality in them. Secondly, That faith is able to quench them.

First, of the first, They have an inflaming quality. There is a secret disposition in the heart of all, to all sin; temptation doth not fall on us, as a ball of fire on ice, or snow, but as a spark on tinder, or lightning on a thatched roof, which presently is in a flame; hence in Scripture, though tempted by Satan, yet the sin is charged on us, Jam. i. 14: 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.' Mark! it is Satan tempts, but our own lust draws us. The fowler lays the trap, but the bird's own desire betrays it into the net. The heart of man is marvellous prone to take fire from these darts. 'Where no wood is, the fire goeth out,' Prov. xxvi., and does no hurt: thus did they on Christ; there was no combustible matter of corruption in him for Satan to work upon. But our hearts being once heated in Adam, could never cool since. A sinner's heart is compared to an oven, Hos. vii. 4: 'They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker.' The heart of man is the oven, the devil the baker, and temptation the fire with which he heats it, and then no sin comes amiss. 'I dwell,' saith David, Psa. lvii., 'among those that are set on fire;' and pray who sets them on fire? the apostle will inform us, Jam. iii. 6: 'set on fire of hell.' O friends! when once the heart is inflamed by temptation, what strange effects doth it produce! how hard to quench such a fire, though in a gracious person! David himself, under the power of a temptation so apparent, that a carnal eye could see it, Joab I mean, who reproved him, yet was hurried to the loss of seventy thousand men's lives; for so much did one sin cost. And if the fire be so raging in a David, what work will it make where no water is nigh, no grace in the heart to quench it! Hence the wicked are said 'to be mad on their sins,' Jer. l. 38. Spurring on without fear, or wit; like a man inflamed with a fever that takes his head, there is no holding of him in his bed; thus a soul possessed with the fury of temptation, runs into the mouth of death and hell, and will not be stopped. *Use* 1. O how should this make us afraid of running into a temptation, when there is such a witchery in it. Some men are too confident, they have too good an opinion of themselves, as if they could not be taken with such a disease, and therefore will breathe in any air. It is just with God to let such be shot with one of Satan's darts, to make them know their own hearts better. Who will pity him, whose house is blown up, that kept his powder in the chimney corner? 'Am I a dog?' saith Hazael, 2 Kings viii. Do you make me a beast, sunk so far below the nature of man, as to imbrue my hands in these horrid murders? yet how soon did this wretch fall into the temptation, and by that one bloody act upon his own liege lord, which he perpetrated as soon as he got home, show that the other evils which the prophet foretold of him were not so improbable as at first he thought. O stand off the devil's mark, unless you mean to have one of the devil's arrows in your side! keep as far from the whirl of temptation as may be; for if once he get you within his circle, thy head may soon be dizzy. One sin helps to kindle another; the less the greater, as the brush the logs: Hos. vii. 5, when the courtiers had got their king to carouse and play the drunkard, he soon learned to play the scorner; 'The princes have made him sick with bottles of wine, he stretched out his hand with scorners.' Secondly, Hath Satan's darts such an enkindling nature? Take heed of being Satan's instrument in putting fire to the corruption of another. Some on purpose do it. Thus the whore perfumes her bed, paints her face. Idolaters, as whorish as the other, set out their temples and altars with superstitious pictures, embellished with all the cost that gold and silver can afford them, to bewitch the spectator's eye. Hence they

Digitized by Google

are said, 'to be inflamed with their idols,' Isa. lvii. 5, as much as any lover with his minion in her whorish dress. And the drunkard he enkindles his neighbour's lust, 'putting the bottle to him,' Hab. ii. 15. Oh! what a base work are these men employed about! By the law it is death for any wilfully to set fire on his neighbour's house; what then deserve they, that set fire on the souls of men, and that no less than hell-fire? But it is possible thou mayest do it unawares, by a less matter than thou dreamest on. A silly child playing with a lighted straw, may set a house on fire, which many wise men cannot quench. And truly Satan may use thy folly and carelessness, to kindle lust in another's heart. Perhaps an idle, light speech drops from thy mouth, and thou meanest no great hurt; but a gust of temptation may carry this spark into thy friend's bosom, and kindle a sad fire there. A wanton attire, perhaps naked breasts and shoulders, which we will suppose thou wearest with a chaste heart, and only because it is the fashion, yet may ensnare another's eye. And if he that kept a pit open but to the hurt of a beast, sinned, how much more thou, who givest occasion to a soul's sin, which is a worse hurt? Paul 'would not eat flesh while the world stood, if it made his brother to offend,' 1 Cor. viii. 13. And canst thou dote on a foolish dress and immodest fashion, whereby many may offend, still to wear it? 'The body,' Christ saith, 'is better than raiment.' The soul then of thy brother is more to be valued surely than an idle fashion of thy raiment.

We come to the second branch of the point, That faith will enable a soul to quench these temptations. This is called our 'victory over the world, even our faith,' 1 John v. 4. Faith sets its triumphant banner on the world's head. The same St. John will tell you what is meant by the world, chap. ii. 15, 16: 'Love not the world; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world.' All that is in the world is said to be lust, because it is food and fuel for lust. Now faith enables the soul to quench those darts which Satan dips and envenoms with these worldly lusts, called by some the worldling's trinity. First, for the lust of the flesh, under which are comprehended those temptations that promise pleasure and delight to the flesh; these, indeed, carry fire in the mouth of them; and when they light on a carnal heart, do soon inflame it with unruly passions and beastly affections. The adulterer is said to 'burn in his lust,' Rom. i. 27; the drunkard 'to be inflamed with his wine,' Isa. v. 11. No sort of temptation works more strongly than those which present sensual pleasure, and promise delight to the flesh; sinners are said, 'to work all uncleanness with greediness;' with a kind of covetousness, for the word imports they never have enough; when the voluptuous person hath wasted his estate, jaded his body in luxury, still the fire burns in his wretched heart; no drink can quench a poisoned man's thirst; nothing but faith can be helpful to a soul in these flames. We find Dives in hell burning, and not a drop of water to cool the tip of his tongue found there. The unbelieving sinner is in a hell above ground, he burns in his lust, and not a drop of water (for want of faith) to quench the fire. By faith it is said those glorious martyrs, Heb. xi., 'quenched the violence of the fire;' and truly the fire of lust is as hot as the fire of martyrdom; by faith alone this is quenched also, Tit. iii. 3, 4: 'We were sometimes foolish, serving divers lusts and pleasures; but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, before he saved us.' Never could they shake off these lusts, their old companions, till by faith they got a new acquaintance with the grace of God revealed in the gospel.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW FAITH QUENCHETH THE LUSTS OF THE FLESH, LUSTS OF THE EYE, AND PRIDE OF LIFE.

SECTION I.—*Quest.* How does faith quench this fiery dart of sensual delights? *Answ.* As it undeceives, and takes off the mist from the Christian's eyes, whereby he is now enabled to see sin in its naked being, and callow principles, before Satan hath plumed. It gives him the native taste and relish of sin, before the devil hath sophisticated it with his sugared sauce. And truly, now sin proves a homely piece, a bitter morsel. Faith hath a piercing eye; it is the evidence of things not seen; it looks behind the curtain of sense, and sees sin before its finery is on, and it be dressed for the stage, to be a brat that comes from hell,

Digitized by Google

and brings hell with it. Now let Satan come, if he please, and present a lust never so enticing, the Christian's answer is ready: Be not cheated, O my soul, saith faith, with a lying spirit. He shews thee a fair Rachel, but he intends thee a blear-eyed Leah; he promises joy, but he will pay thee sorrow. The clothes that make this lust so comely are not its own. The sweetness thou takest is not native, but borrowed to deceive thee withal. 'Thou art Saul,' said the witch of Endor, 'why hast thou deceived me?' Thus faith can call sin and Satan by their own names, when they come in a disguise; Thou art Satan, saith faith, why wouldst thou deceive me? God hath said, sin is bitter as gall and wormwood, and wouldst thou make me believe I can gather the sweet fruits of true delight from this root of bitterness? grapes from these thorns?

Secondly, Faith doth not only enable the soul to see the nature of all sin void of true pleasure, but also how transient its false pleasures are; I will not lose, saith faith, sure mercies for transient, uncertain pleasures. This made Moses leap out of the pleasures of the Egyptian court into the fire of affliction, Heb. xi. 25, because he saw them 'pleasures for a season.' Should you see a man in a ship throw himself overboard into the sea, you might at first think him out of his wits, but if a little while after you should see him stand safe on the shore, and the ship swallowed up of the waves, you would then think he took the wisest course. Faith sees the world and all the pleasures of sin sinking: there is a leak in them which the wit of man cannot stop. Now, is it not better to swim by faith through a sea of trouble, and get safe to heaven at last, than to sit in the lap of sinful pleasures, till we drown in hell's gulph? It is impossible the pleasure of sin should last long. First, Because it is not natural. Whatever is not natural soon decays; the nature of sugar is to be sweet, and therefore it holds its sweetness, but sweeten beer or wine never so much with sugar, in a few days they will lose their sweetness. The pleasure of sin is extrinsical to its nature, and therefore will corrupt. None of that sweetness which now bewitches sinners will be tasted in hell. The sinner shall have his cup spiced there by his hand that will have it a bitter draught. Secondly, The pleasures of sin must needs be short, because life cannot be long, and they both end together. Indeed, many times the pleasure of sin dies before the man dies: sinners live to bury their joy in this world. The worm breeds in their conscience before it breeds in their flesh by death. But be sure the pleasure of sin never survives this world. The word is gone out of God's mouth, every sinner shall 'lie down in sorrow, and wake in sorrow.' Hell is too hot a climate for wanton delights to live in. Now, faith is a provident, wise grace, and makes the soul bethink itself how it may live in another world; whereas, the carnal heart is all for the present; his snout is in the trough, and while his draught lasts, he thinks it will never end. But faith hath a large stride: at one pace it can reach over a whole life of years, and see them done while they are but beginning. 'I have seen an end of all perfection,' saith David; he saw the wicked when growing on their bed of pleasure, cut down, and burning in God's oven, as if it were done already, Psa. xxxvii. 2; and faith will do the same for every Christian, according to its strength and activity. And who would envy the condemned man his feast which he hath in his way to the gallows?

Thirdly, Faith outvies Satan's proffers, by shewing the soul where choicer enjoyments are to be had at a cheaper rate. Indeed, best is best cheap. Who will not go to that shop where he may be best served? This law holds in force among sinners themselves: the drunkard goes where he may have the best wine; the glutton, where he may have the best cheer. Now faith presents such enjoyments to the soul, that are beyond all compare best; it leads to the promise, and entertains it there at Christ's cost, with all the rich dainties of the gospel; not a dish that the saints feed on in heaven, but faith can set it before the soul, and give it, though not a full meal, yet such a taste as shall melt it in joy unspeakable and full of glory. This sure must needs quench the temptation. When Satan sends to invite the Christian to his gross fare, will not the soul say, Should I forsake those pleasures that cheered, yea, ravished my heart, to go and debase myself with sin's polluted bread, where I shall be but a fellow-commoner with the beast, (who shares in sensual pleasures with man,) yea, become worse than the beast; a devil, like Judas, who arose from his Master's table to sit at the devil's.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.—Secondly, The lusts of the eye, these are quenched by faith; by the lust of the eye, the Apostle means those temptations which are drawn from the world's pelf and treasure, called so, first, because it is the eye that commits adultery with these things; as the unclean eye looks upon another man's wife, so the covetous eye looks on another's wealth to lust after it. Secondly, Because that all the good that in a manner is received from them, is but to please the eye, Eccl. v. 11: 'What good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding them with their eyes?' That is, if a man hath but to buy any food and raiment, though enough to pay his daily shot of necessary expenses, the surplusage serves only for the eye to play the wanton with; yet we see how pleasing a morsel they are to a carnal heart. It is rare to find a man that will not stoop, by base and sordid practices, to take up this golden apple. When I consider what sad effects this temptation had on Ahab, who, to gain a spot of ground of a few acres, (that could not add much to a king's revenues,) durst swim to it in the owner's blood; I wonder not to see men, whose condition is necessitous, nibbling at the hook of temptation, where the bait is a far greater worldly advantage. This is the door that the devil entered into Judas by: this was the break-neck of Demas's faith, he embraced this present world. Now faith will quench a temptation edged with these. First, Faith persuades the soul of God's fatherly care and providence over it. And where this breast-work is raised, the soul is safe so long as it keeps within its line. Oh! saith Satan, if thou wouldst but venture on a lie, make bold a little with God in such a command, this wedge of gold is thine, and that advantage will accrue to thy estate. Now, faith will teach the soul to reply, I am well provided for already; Satan, I need not thy pension, why should I play the thief for that which, if good, God hath promised to give? Heb. xiii. 5: 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' How canst thou want, O my soul, that by the promise hast command of God's purse? Let him that is without God in the world shift and shirk by his wits; do thou live by thy faith? Secondly, Faith teaches the soul, that the creature's comfort and content comes not from abundance, but God's blessing, and to gain the world by a sin, is not the road that leads to God's blessing, Prov. xxviii. 20: 'A faithful man abounds with blessings; but he that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent.' Shouldst thou, saith faith, heap up the world's goods in an evil way, thou art never the nearer to the content thou expectest: it is hard to steal one's meat, and then crave a blessing on it at God's hands. What thou gettest by sin, Satan cannot give thee quiet possession of, nor discharge those suits which God will certainly commence against thee. Thirdly, Faith advanceth the soul to higher projects, than to seek the things of this life. It discovers a world beyond the moon; and there lies faith's merchandise; leaving the colliers of this world to load themselves with clay and coals, while it trades for grace and glory; faith fetcheth its riches from afar. Saul did not more willingly leave seeking his father's asses, when he heard of a kingdom, than the believing soul leaves prowling for the earth, now it hears of Christ and heaven, Psa. xxxix. 6, 7. Verse 6, we find holy David branding the men of the world for folly, that they troubled themselves so much for nought. 'Surely,' saith he, 'they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them;' and ver. 7, we have him with a holy disdain turning his back upon the world, as not worth his pains; 'and now, Lord, what wait I for?' As if he had said, Is this the portion I could be content to set down with,—to set upon a greater heap of riches than my neighbour hath? 'My hope is in thee, deliver me from all my transgressions,' ver. 8. Every one as they like. Let them that love the world, take the world; but, Lord, pay not my portion in gold or silver, but in pardon of sin: this I wait for. Abraham, he by faith had so low an esteem of this world's treasure, that he left his own country to live here a stranger, in hope of a better, Heb. xi.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, The lust of the world, the pride of life. There is an itch of pride in man's heart after the gaudy honours of the world; and this itch of man's proud flesh, the devil labours to scratch and irritate by suitable proffers. And when the temptation without, and lust within meet, then it works to purpose. Balaam loved the way that led to court, and therefore spurs on his

Digitized by Google

conscience, that boggled more than the ass he rode on, till the blood came. The Jews, when convinced of Christ's person and doctrine, yet were such slaves to their honour and credit, that they part with Christ rather than hazard that, John xii. 43: 'For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.' Now faith quenches this temptation, and with a holy scorn disdains that all the preferment the world hath to heap on him, should be a bribe for the least sin, Heb. xi. 24: 'By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.' Though by his adoption he might have been heir, for aught we know, to the crown; yet this he threw at his heels: it is not said he did not seek to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, though that would have sounded a high commendation, having so fair an opportunity; some would not have scrupled a little court flattery, thereby to have worked themselves into further favour, having so fair a stock in the king's heart to set up with; but he 'refused to be called;' honour came trouling in upon him, as water at a flowing tide; now, to stand against this flood of preferment, and no breach made in his heart to entertain it, this was admirable indeed. Nay, he did not refuse this preferment for any principality that he hoped for elsewhere. He forsook not one court to go to another, but to join with a beggarly reproached people; yea, by rejecting their favour he incurred the wrath of the king, yet faith carried him through all those heights and depths of favour and disgrace, honour, and dishonour; and truly, wherever this grace is, (allowing for its strength and weakness,) it will do the like. We find, ver. 33 of the same chapter, how 'Samuel and the prophets through faith subdued kingdoms:' which sure is not only meant of the conquest of the sword, (though some of them performed honourable achievements that way,) but also by despising the honour and preferments of them. This indeed many of the prophets are famous for; and in particular Samuel, who at God's command gave away a kingdom from his own house and family, by anointing Saul, though himself at present had possession of the chief magistrate's chair. And others, ver. 37, we read, 'were tempted:' *i. e.*, when ready to suffer, were offered great preferments if they would bend to the times, by receding a little from the bold profession of their faith; but they chose rather the flames of martyrdom than the favour of princes on those terms. But more particularly to shew you how faith quenches this temptation.

First, Faith takes away the fuel that feeds this temptation. Withdraw the oil, and the lamp goes out. Now that which is fuel to this temptation, is pride; where this lust is in any strength, no wonder the creature's eyes are dazzled with the sight of that which suits the desires of his heart so well. The devil now by a temptation does but broach, and so give vent to what the heart itself is full with. Simon Magus had a haughty spirit, he would be some great man, and therefore when he did but think an opportunity was offered to mount him up the stage, he is all on fire with a desire of having a gift to work miracles, that he dares offer to play the huckster with the apostle. Whereas an humble spirit loves a low seat, is not ambitious to stand high in the thoughts of others, and so, while he stoops in his own opinion of himself, the bullet flies over his head, which hits the proud man on the breast. Now it is faith lays the heart low. Pride and faith are opposed; like two buckets, if one goes up, the other goes down in the soul, Hab. ii. 4: 'Behold, his soul that is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith.'

Secondly, Faith is Christ's favourite, and so makes the Christian expect all his honour from him; indeed it is one of the prime acts of faith to cast the soul on God in Christ, as all-sufficient to make it completely happy. And therefore when a temptation comes, Soul, thou mayest raise thyself in the world, to this place, or that esteem, if thou wilt but dissemble thy profession, or allow thyself in such a sin; now faith chokes the bullet. Remember whose thou art, O my soul; hast thou not taken God for thy liege Lord, and wilt thou accept preferment from another's hand? Princes will not suffer their courtiers to become pensioners to a foreign prince, least of all to a prince in hostility to them. Now, saith faith, the honour or applause thou gettest by sin makes thee pensioner to the devil himself, who is the greatest enemy God hath.

Thirdly, Faith shews the danger of such a bargain, should a Christian gain the glory of the world for one sin. First, says faith, hadst thou the whole

Digitized by Google

world's empire, with all bowing before thee, this would not add to thy stature one cubit in the eye of God. But thy sin which thou payest for the purchase, blots thy name in his thoughts, yea, makes thee odious in his sight; God must first be out of love with himself, before he can love a sinner as such. Now wilt thou incur this for that? Is it wisdom to lose a prize to draw a blank? Secondly, says faith, the world's pomp and glory cannot satisfy thee; it may kindle thirstings in thy soul, but quench none; it will beget a thousand cares and fears, but quiet none. But thy sin that procures these, hath a power to torment and torture thy soul. Thirdly, when thou hast the world's crown on thy head how long shalt thou wear it? They are sick at Rome, and die in princes' courts, as well as at the Spittle; yea, kings themselves are put as naked to their beds of dust as others. In that day all thy thoughts will perish with thee; but the guilt of thy sin, which was the ladder by which thou didst climb up the hill of honour, will dog thee into another world. These and such like are the considerations by which faith breaks off the bargain.

Fourthly, Faith presents the Christian with the exploits of former saints, who have renounced the world's honour and applause, rather than defile their consciences, and prostitute their souls to be deflowered by the least sin. Great Tamerlane carried the lives of his ancestors into the field with him, in which he used to read before he gave battle, that he might be stirred up, not to stain the blood of his family by cowardice, or any unworthy behaviour in fight. Thus faith peruses the roll of Scripture-saints, and the exploits of their faith over the world, that the Christian may be excited to the same gallantry of spirit. This was plainly the apostle's design in recording those worthies, with the trophies of their faith, Heb. xi., that some of their nobleness might steal into our hearts while we are reading of them, as appears chapter xii. 1: 'Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset us.' Oh, what courage does it put into the soldier, to see some before him to run upon the face of death! Elisha having seen the miracles God wrought by Elijah, smites the waters of Jordan with his mantle, saying, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah? and they parted,' 2 Kings ii. 14. Thus faith makes use of the exploits of former saints, and turns them into prayer. O where is the Lord God of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and those other worthies, who by their faith have trampled on the world's pomp and glory, subdued temptations, stopped the mouths of lion-like lusts? Art not thou, O God, the God of the valleys, the meanest saints, as well as of the mountains, more eminent heroes? Do not the same blood and spirits run in the veins of all believers? Were they victorious, and shall I be the only slave, and of so prostrate a spirit, like Issachar, to crouch under my burden of corruption without shaking it off? Help me, O my God, that I may be avenged of these mine enemies, And when it hath been with God, it will also plead with the Christian himself. Awake, saith faith, O my soul, and prove thyself akin to these holy men, that thou art born of God as they were, by thy victory over the world.

CHAPTER XV.

SHEWETH THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FAITH'S CONQUEST OVER THE WORLD BY QUENCHING THE FIERY DARTS SHOT FROM IT, AND THAT VICTORY WHICH SOME OF THE BETTER HEATHENS ATTAINED TO; AS ALSO A TRIAL OF OUR FAITH PROPOUNDED BY THIS POWER TO QUENCH SATAN'S ENTICING TEMPTATIONS MORE OR LESS.

Object. But some may say, If this be all faith enables to, this is no more than some heathens have done. They have trampled on the profits and pleasures of this world, who never knew what faith meant. *Ans.* Indeed, many of them have done so much by their moral principles as may make some, who would willingly pass for believers ashamed to be outdone by them who shot with so weak a bow. Yet it will appear that there is a victory of faith which, in the true believer, outshoots them more than their moral conquest doth the debauched conversations of looser Christians. First, Faith quenches the lust of the heart; *i. e.*, those very embers of corruption which are so secretly raked up in the inclination of the soul, find the force and power of faith to quench them.

Digitized by Google

Faith purifies the heart, Acts xv. 9. Now, none of their conquests reached the heart. Their longest ladder was too short to reach the walls of this castle; they swept the door, trimmed a few outward rooms, but the seat and sink of all (in the corruption of man's nature) was never cleansed by them; so that the fire of lust was rather pent in than put out. How is it possible that could be cleansed, the filthiness of which was never known to them? Alas! they never looked so near themselves as to find that enemy within them which they thought was without. Thus, while they laboured to keep the thief out, he was within, and they knew it not; for they did either proudly think that the soul was naturally endued with principles of virtue, or vainly imagined it to be but an *abrasa tabula*—white paper, on which they might right good or evil, as they pleased. Thus, you see, the seat of their war was in the world without them, which after some sort they conquered; but the lust within remained untouched, because a *terra incognita* to them. It is faith that first discovers this. Secondly, Faith's victory is uniform. Sin, in Scripture, is called 'a body,' Rom. vi. 6, because made up of several members, or as the body of an army, consisting of many troops and regiments. It is one thing to beat a troop, or put a wing of an army to flight, and another thing to rout and break the whole army. Something hath been done by moral principles like the former; they have got some petty victory, and had the chase of some more gross and exterior sins; but then they were fearfully beaten by some other of sin's troops. When they seemed to triumph over the lust of the flesh and eye, the world's profits and pleasures, they were at the same time slaves to the pride of life, mere *gloriæ animalia*, kept in chains by the credit and applause of the world. As the sea, which, they say, loses as much in one place of the land as it gains in another; so what they got in a seeming victory over one sin, they lost again by being in bondage to another, and that a worse, because more spiritual. But now faith is uniform, and routs the whole body of sin, that not one single lust stands in its unbroken strength: 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. vi. 14. Sin may stir like a wounded soldier on his knees,—it may rally like broken troops, but never be long master of the field where true faith is. Thirdly, Faith enables the soul not only to quench these lusts, but the temptation being quenched, it enables him to use the world itself against Satan, and so beat him with his own weapons, by striking his own cudgels at his head. Faith quenches the fire of Satan's darts, and then shoots them back on him. This it doth by reducing all the enjoyments of the world which the Christian is possessed of into a subordination for the glory of God. Some of the heathen's admired champions, to cure the lust of the eye, have plucked them out; to shew the contempt of riches, have thrown their money into the sea; to conquer the world's honour and applause, have sequestered themselves from all company. Shall we call this a victory, or rather a frenzy? But faith enables us to accomplish a nobler conquest. Indeed, when God calls for any of these enjoyments, faith can lay all at Christ's feet; but while God allows them, faith's skill and power is in correcting the flatulent nature of them, so that what on a wicked heart rots and corrupts, by faith turns to good nourishment in a gracious soul. If a house were on fire, which would you count the wiser man, he that goes to quench it by pulling the house down, or he that by throwing water on it doth this as fully, and leaves the house standing for your use? The heathen, and some superstitious persons, think to mortify by taking away what God gives us leave to use; but faith puts out the fire of lust in the heart, and leaves the creature to be improved for God's glory, and enjoyed to the Christian's comfort.

First, This may be a touchstone for our faith. Is thy faith a temptation-quenching faith? Many say they believe: yes, that they do! They thank God they are not infidels. Well, what exploits canst thou do with thy faith? Is it able to defend thee in a day of battle, and cover thy soul in safety when Satan's darts fly thick about thee? or is it such a sorry shield that it lets every arrow of temptation pierce thy heart through it? Thou believest, but still as great a slave to thy lust as ever. When a good fellow calls thee out to a drunken meeting, thy faith cannot keep thee out of the snare, but away thou goest, as a fool to the stocks. If Satan tells thee thou mayest improve thy estate by a lie, or cheat in thy shop, thy faith stands very tamely by, and makes no resistance.

Digitized by Google

In a word, thou hast faith, and yet drivest a trade of sin in the very face of it. O, God forbid that any should be under so great a delusion, to carry such a lie in their hand, and think it a saving faith! Will this faith ever carry thee to heaven, which is not able to bring thee out of hell? for there thou livest while under the power of thy lust. 'Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and come and stand before me?' Jer. vii. 9, 10. If this be faith, well fare the honest heathens who escaped these gross pollutions of the world, which you, like beasts, with your faith, lie wallowing in. I had rather be a sober heathen than a drunken Christian, a chaste heathen than an unclean believer. O, venture not the life of your souls with such a paper shield; come to Him for a faith who is the faith-maker; he will help thee to a faith that shall quench the very fire of hell itself, though kindled in thy bosom, and divide the waves of thy lust, in which now thou art drowned, (as once he did the sea for Israel,) that thou shalt go on dry land to heaven, and thy lust not be able to knock off the wheels of thy chariot. But if thou attemptest this with thy false faith, the Egyptians' end will be thine. 'By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians essaying to do, were drowned,' Heb. xi. 29. Though true faith gets safely through the depths of temptation, yet false faith will drown by the way. But perhaps thou canst tell us better news than this, and give us better evidence for the truth of thy faith. Let us therefore hear what singular thing hath been done by thee since thou hast become a believer. The time was, thou wert as weak as water; every blast of temptation blew thee down; thou wert carried as a dead fish with the stream; but canst thou say since thou hast been acquainted with Christ, thou art endued with a power to repel those temptations which before held thy heart, in perfect obedience to their commands? Canst thou now be content to bring thy lusts, which once were of great price, with thee, as those believers did their conjuring books, Acts xix. 19, and throw them into the fire of God's love in Christ to thy soul, there to consume them? Possibly thou hast not them at present under thy foot in a full conquest, yet have they begun to fall in thy thoughts, and is thy countenance changed towards them to what it was? Be of good comfort, this is enough to prove thy faith of the royal race. 'When Christ cometh,' said the convinced Jews, 'will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?' John vii. 31. And when Christ comes by faith into the heart, will he do greater works than these thy faith hath done?

CHAPTER XVI.

AN OBJECTION AGAINST BELIEVING ANSWERED; AND SOME DIRECTIONS HOW TO USE THIS SHIELD TO QUENCH ENTICING TEMPTATIONS.

THIS helps to answer that objection, by which many poor souls are discouraged from believing, and closing with the promise. O, says the tempted soul, you bid me believe: alas! how dare I, when I cannot get the victory over such a lust, and am overcome by such a temptation? What have such as I to do with a promise? See here this Goliath prostrated: thou art not to believe because thou art victorious, but that thou mayest be victorious. The reason why thou art so worsted by thy enemy is for want of faith: 'If ye will not believe, ye surely shall not be established,' Isa. vii. 9. Wouldst thou be cured before thou goest to the physician? That sounds harsh to thy own reason, and is as if thou shouldst say, thou wilt not go to the physician till thou hast no need of him. No, go and touch Christ by faith, that virtue may flow from him to thy soul. Thou must not think to eat the fruit before thou plantest the tree. Victory over corruption is a sweet fruit, but found growing only upon faith's branches. Satan does by thee as Saul did by the Israelites, who weakenened their hands in battle by keeping them fasting. Up and eat, Christian, a full meal on the promise, if thou wouldst find thy eyes enlightened and thy hands strengthened for the combat with thy lusts. It is one part of the doctrine of devils, which we read of, 1 Tim. iv. 3, 'to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving.' But the grand doctrine of the devil, which above all he would promote, is to keep poor, trembling souls from feeding by faith on the Lord Jesus, as if Christ were some forbidden fruit; whereas God hath appointed him above all others, that he should be received with thanksgiving of all humble sinners. And, therefore, in the name of God, I invite you to his feast.

Digitized by Google

O, let not your souls (who see your need of Christ, and are pinched at your very heart for want of him) be lean from day to day through your unbelief; but come, eat, and your souls shall live. Never was child more welcome to his father's table than thou art to Christ's, and that feast which stands on the gospel-board.

Make use of faith, O ye saints, as for other ends and purposes, so particularly for this, of quenching this kind of fiery darts. It is not the having a shield, but the holding and wielding it, that defends the Christian. Let not Satan take thee with thy faith out of thy hand, as David did Saul in the cave, with his spear sticking in the ground, which should have been in his hand.

Quest. But how would you have me use my shield of faith for my defence against these fiery darts of Satan's enticing temptations? *Ans.* By faith engage God to come in to thy succour against them. Now there are three engaging acts of faith, which will bind God (as we may so say with reverence) to help thee, because he binds himself to help such.

The first is the prayerful act of faith. Open thy case to God in prayer, and call in help from heaven; as the governor of a besieged castle wouldst send a secret messenger to his general or prince, to let him know his state and straits. The apostle James, chap iv. 2, saith, 'Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.' Our victory must drop from heaven, if we have any; but it stays till prayer comes for it. Though God had a purpose to deliver Israel out of Egypt, yet there was no news of his coming till the groans of his people rang in his ears. This gave heaven the alarm; their cry came up unto God, and he heard their groaning, and remembered his covenant, Exod. ii. 24. Now, the more to prevail upon God in this act of faith, fortify thy prayer with those strong reasons which saints have used in like cases. First, Engage God from his promise, when thou prayest against any sin; shew God his own hand in such promises as these: 'Sin shall not have dominion over you,' Rom. vi. 14. 'He will subdue our iniquities,' Micah vii. 19. Prayer is nothing but the promise reversed, or God's word formed into an argument, and retorted by faith upon God again. Know, Christian, thou hast law on thy side,—bills and bonds must be paid. David prays against the sins of a wanton eye and a dead heart: 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way,' Psa. cxix. 37; and see how he urgeth his argument in the next words,—'Establish thy word unto thy servant,' ver. 38. A good man is as good as his word, and will not a good God? But where finds David such a word for help against these sins? Surely in the covenant, it is in the Magna Charta. The first promise held forth thus much,—'The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.' Secondly, Plead with God from relation. Art thou one whom God hath taken into his family? O what an argument hast thou here! 'I am thine; Lord save me,' saith David. Who will look after the child, if the father will not? Is it to thy honour, O God, that any child of thine should be a slave to sin? 'Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name; order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' Psa. cxix. 132. Thirdly, Engage God, from his Son's bloody death, to help thee against thy lusts, which were his murderers. What died Christ for, but to 'redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people?' Tit. ii. 14. And shall not Christ be reimbursed of what he laid out? Shall he not have the price of his blood, and purchase of his death? In a word, what is Christ praying for in heaven, but what was in his mouth when praying on earth, that his 'Father would sanctify them, and keep them from the evil of the world?' Thou comest in good time to beg that of God which thou findest Christ hath asked for thee.

A second way to engage God is by faith's expecting act: when thou hast been with God, expect good from God. 'I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up,' Psa. v. 3. For want of this many a prayer is lost. If you do not believe, why do you pray? And if you believe, why do you not expect? By praying you seem to depend on God; by not expecting, you again renounce your confidence. What is this, but to take his name in vain? O, Christian! stand to your prayer in a holy expectation of what you have begged upon the credit of the promise, and you cannot miss of the ruin of your lusts.

Quest. O but, saith the poor soul, shall not I presume, to expect, when I have prayed against my corruptions, that God will bestow so great a mercy on me as

Digitized by Google

this is? *Ans.* First, Dost thou know what it is to presume? He presumes that takes a thing before it is granted. He were a presumptuous man indeed that should take your meat off your table who never was invited; but I hope your guest is not over bold who ventures to eat of what you set before him. For one to break into your house, upon whom you shut the door, were presumptuous; but to come out of a storm into your house, when you are so kind as to call him in, is no presumption, but good manners. And if God opens not the door of his promise to be a sanctuary unto poor, humbled sinners, flying from the rage of their lust, truly then I know none on this side heaven that can expect welcome. God hath promised to be a King, a Lawgiver to his people. Now, it is no presumption in subjects to come under their prince's shadow, and expect protection from him. God promiseth, Isa. xxxiii. 21, 22, that he will be 'a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ships pass thereby; for the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.' God speaks to his people as a prince would to his subjects. He will secure them in their traffic and merchandise. Now, soul, thou art molested with many lusts that infest thee, and obstruct thy commerce with heaven; yea, thou hast complained to thy God, what loss thou hast suffered by them; is it now presumption to expect relief from him, that he will rescue thee from them, that thou mayest serve him without fear who is thy liege Lord? Secondly, You have the saints for your precedents; who, when they have been in combat with their corruptions, yea, been foiled by them, have even then exercised their faith on God, and expected the ruin of those enemies, which for the present have overrun them: Psa. lxv. 3, 'Iniquities prevail against me:' he means his own sins; but see his faith: at the same time that they prevailed over him, he beholds God destroying them; as appears in the very next words, 'As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.' See here, poor Christian, who thinkest that thou shalt never get above deck, holy David has a faith, not only for himself, but also all believers, of whose number I suppose thee one. And mark the ground he hath for this his confidence, taken from God's choosing act: 'Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts,' ver. 4. As if he had said, Surely he will not let them be under the power of sin, or in want of his gracious succour, whom he sets so near himself. This is Christ's own argument against Satan in the behalf of his people: 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee,' Zech. ii. 2. Thirdly, Thou hast encouragement for this expecting act of faith, from what God already hath enabled thee to do. Thou canst (if a believer indeed) through mercy say, that sin is not in that strength within thy soul, as it was before thy acquaintance with Christ, his word and ways. Though thou art not what thou wouldst be, yet thou art not what thou hast been. There was a time when sin reigned in thy heart without control: thou didst go to sin as a ship to sea, before wind and tide; thou didst spread thy affections to receive the gale of temptation; but now the tide is turned, and runs against those motions, though weakly; yet thou findest a secret wrestling with them, and God seasonably succouring thee, so that Satan hath not all his will on thee. Well, here is a sweet beginning, and, let me tell thee, this promiseth thee a readiness in God to perfect the victory; yea, God would have thy faith improve this into a confidence for a total deliverance. Moses, when he slew the Egyptian, 'supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them,' Acts vii. 25. O, it is a bad improvement of the succours which God gives us, to argue from them in favour of unbelief: 'He smote the rock, that the waters gushed out; but can he give bread also?' He broke my heart, saith the poor creature, when it was a rock, and brought me home when I was walking in the pride of my heart against him; but can he give bread to nourish my weak grace? I am out of Egypt; but can he master those giants in iron chariots, that stand between me and Canaan? He helped me in such a temptation, but what shall I do in the next? Oh! do not grieve a good God with these heart-aching questions. You have the former rain, why should you question the latter? Benjamin was a good pledge to make old Jacob willing to go himself to Egypt. The grace which God hath already enriched thee with, is a sure pledge that more is coming to it.

Digitized by Google

The expecting act of faith must produce an endeavouring act to set the soul on work, in the confidence of that succour it expects from God. When Jehoshaphat had prayed, and established his faith on the good word of promise, then he takes the field, and marches out under this victorious banner against his enemies, 2 Chron. xx. Go, Christian, do as he did. What David gave in counsel to his son Solomon, that give I to thee, 1 Chron. xxii. 16, 'Arise, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee.' That faith which set thee on work for God, against thy sins as his enemies, will undoubtedly set God on work for thee against them as thine. The lepers in the gospel were cured, not sitting still, but walking: 'It came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed,' Luke xvii. 14. They met their cure in an act of obedience to Christ's command. The promise saith, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' the command bids, 'Mortify your earthly members:' go thou, and make a valiant attempt against thy lust, upon this word of command; and in doing thy duty, thou shalt find the performance of the promise. The reason of so many fruitless complaints among Christians, concerning the power of their corruptions, is, that they endeavour without exercising faith on the promise, and such indeed go at their own peril, like those bold men, Numb. xiv. 40, who presumptuously went up the hill to fight the Canaanites, though Moses told them the Lord was not among them; thus slighting the command of Moses, their leader, as if they needed not his help to the victory; a clear resemblance of those who go in their own strength to resist their corruptions, and so fall before them; or else they pretend to believe, their faith doth not set them on a vigorous endeavour. They use faith as an eye, but not as a hand; they look for victory to drop from heaven upon their heads, but do not fight to obtain it. This is a mere fanciful faith. He that believes God for the event, believes him for the means also. If the patient dare trust the physician for his cure, he dare also follow his prescription in order to it: and, therefore, Christian, sit not still, and say thy sins shall fall, but put thyself in array against them. God, who hath promised thee victory, calls thee to thy arms, and means to use thy own hands in the battle, if ever thou gettest it. 'Get thee up,' said the Lord to Joshua; 'wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?' Josh. vii. 10. God liked the prayer and moan he made very well; but there was something else for him to do, besides praying and weeping, before the Amorites could be overcome; and so there is for thee, Christian, with thy faith, besides praying and expecting thy lust down, and that is, searching narrowly into thy heart, whether there be not some neglect on thy part, as an Achan, for which thou art so worsted by sin, and fleest before the face of every temptation.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF THE SECOND SORT OF TEMPTATIONS, THAT ARE MORE AFFRIGHTING, AND HOW FAITH QUENCHETH THESE DARTS IN PARTICULAR TEMPTATIONS TO ATHEISM, WHICH IS OVERCOME, NOT BY REASON, BUT BY FAITH.

HAVING thus dispatched the first kind of fiery darts, temptations, which are enticing and alluring, we now proceed to the second kind, such as are of an affrighting nature, by which Satan would dismay the Christian; and my task is still the same, to show the power of faith in quenching these fiery darts.

SECTION I.—Faith, and only faith, can quench the fiery darts of Satan's affrighting temptations. This sort of fiery darts is our enemy's reserve; when the other proves unsuccessful, then he opens this quiver, and sends a shower of these arrows to set the soul on flame, if not of sin, yet of terror and horror. When he cannot carry a soul laughing to hell, through the witchery of pleasing temptations, he will endeavour to make him go mourning to heaven, by affrighting him with the other. And truly, it is not the least support to a soul exercised with these, to consider, that they are a good sign, that Satan is hard put to it when these arrows are upon his string. You know an enemy that keeps a castle will preserve it as long as he can hold it: but when he sees he must quit, he sets it on fire, to render it, if possible, useless to them that come after him. While the strong man can keep his house under his own power, he labours to keep it in peace; he quenches those fire-balls of conviction that the Spirit is often shooting into the conscience: but when he perceives it is no longer tenable, the mutiny within increases, and there is a secret whisper in the soul of yielding unto Christ,

Digitized by Google

now he labours to set the soul on fire, by his affrighting temptations; much more doth he labour to do it, when Christ hath got the castle out of his hands and keeps it by the power of his grace. It is very observable, that all the darts shot against Job were of this sort; he hardly made any use of the other, when God gave him leave to practise his skill. Why did he not tempt him with some golden apple of profit or pleasure, or such-like enticing temptations? Surely, the high testimony God gave to this his eminent servant discouraged Satan from this method: yea, no doubt, he had tried Job's manhood before this, as to those, and found him too hard; so that now he had no other way left probable to attain his design but this. I shall content myself with three instances of this sort of fiery darts, showing how faith quenches them all: temptations to atheism, blasphemy, and despair.

SECTION II.—The first is, his temptation to atheism, which, for the horrid nature thereof, may well be called a fiery dart: partly because by this he makes so bold an attempt, striking at the being of God himself; as also, because of the consternation he produceth in a gracious soul wounded with it. It is true, the devil, who cannot himself turn atheist, is much less able to make a child of God an atheist, who hath not only, in common with other men, an indelible stamp of Deity in his conscience, but such a sculpture of the Divine nature in his heart, as irresistibly demonstrates a God; yea, lively represents a holy God, whose image it is; so that it is impossible a holy heart should be fully overcome with this temptation, having an argument beyond all the world of wicked men, and devils themselves, to prove a Deity, that is, a new nature in him, 'created after God in righteousness and true holiness;' by which, even when he is buffeted with atheistical injections, he saith in his heart there is a God, though Satan, in the paroxysm of the temptation, clouds his reasoning faculty for the present with this smoke of hell, which doth more offend and affright, than persuade his gracious heart to espouse such a principle, as it doth in a wicked man; who, when on the contrary he is urged by his conscience to believe on God, saith in his heart, 'There is no God;' that is, he wisheth there were none. And this may exceedingly comfort a saint, (who, notwithstanding such injections to atheism, clings about God in his affections, and dares not for a world allow himself to sin against him; no, not when most oppressed with this temptation,) that he shall not pass for an atheist in God's account, whatever Satan makes him believe. As the wicked shall not be cleared from atheism by their naked profession of Deity, so long as those thoughts of God are so loose and weak, as not to command them into any obedience to his commands, Psa. xxxvi. 1: 'The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes;' the holy prophet argues from the wickedness of the sinner's life to the atheism of his heart; so on the contrary, the holy life of a gracious person, saith in mine heart, that the fear of God is before his eyes: it appears plainly, that he believes a God, and reveres that God whom he believes to be. Well though a gracious heart can never be overcome, yet he may be sadly disquieted with it. Now in the next place, I am to shew you how the Christian may quench this fiery dart, and that is, by faith alone.

Quest. But what need of faith? Will not reason serve the turn to stop the devil's mouth in this point? Cannot the eye of reason espy a Deity except it look through the spectacles of faith? *Ans.* I grant that this is a piece of natural divinity, and reason is able to demonstrate the being of a God; where the Scriptures never came, a Deity is acknowledged: Micah iv. 5, 'All people will walk, every one in the name of his god:' where it is supposed, that every nation owns some deity, and hath a worship for that god which they own; yet in a furious assault of temptation, it is faith alone that is able to keep the field, and quench the fire of this dart. First, That light which reason affords, is duskish and confused, serving for little more than in general to shew there is a God; it will never tell who or what this God is. Till Paul brought the Athenians acquainted with the true God, how little of this first principle in religion was known among them, though that city was then the very eye of the world for learning! And if the world's eye was so dark, as not to know the God they worshipped, what then was the world's darkness itself,—those barbarous places, which wanted all tillage and culture of human literature, to advance and perfect their understandings? This is a Scripture notion, and so is the object of faith,

Digitized by Google

rather than reason, Heb. xi. 6: 'He that cometh to God, must believe that he is.' Mark that,—'he must believe.' Now faith goes upon the credit of the word, and takes all upon trust from its authority: he 'must believe that he is;' which, as Mr. Perkins, on the place, saith, is not nakedly to know there is a God, but to know God to be God; which reason of itself can never do. Such is the blindness and corruption of our nature, that we have very deformed and misshapen thoughts of him, till with the eye of faith we see his face in the glass of the word; and therefore the same learned man affirms, that all men whoever came of Adam (Christ alone excepted) are by nature atheists; because, at the same time that they acknowledge a God, they deny his power, presence, and justice, and allow him to be only what pleaseth themselves. Indeed, it is natural for every man to desire to accommodate his lusts with such conceptions of God as may be most favourable to and suit best with them. God chargeth some for this: 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself,' Psa. l. 21. Sinners do with God as the Ethiopians do with angels, whom they picture with black faces, that they may be like themselves. Secondly, Suppose thou wert able by reason to demonstrate what God is, yet it were dangerous to enter the list, and dispute it out, by thy naked reason, with Satan, who hath, though the worst cause, yet the nimbler head. There is more disparity between thee and Satan, than between the weakest idiot and the greatest scholar in the world. Now, who would put a cause of so great importance to such a hazard, as thou must do, by reasoning the point with him, who so far outmatches thee? But there is a divine authority in the word which faith builds on, and this hath a throne in the conscience of the devil himself; he flies at this: for which cause, Christ, though he was able by reason to have baffled the devil, yet, to give us a pattern what arms to use for our defence in our conflicts with Satan, he repels him only by the word. 'It is written,' saith Christ, Luke iv. 4, and again, ver. 8, 'It is written.' And it is very observable, how powerful the word quoted by Christ was to defeat the devil; so that he had not a word to reply to any Scripture that was brought; but upon the very mention of the word, was forced to go to another argument. Had Eve but stood to her first answer, 'God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,' Gen. iii. 3, she would have been too hard for the devil; but letting her hand go, which she had by faith on the word, presently she fell into her enemy's hand. Thus, in this particular, when the Christian, in the heat of temptation, by faith stands upon his defence, interposing the word between him and Satan's blows,—I believe that God is, though I cannot comprehend his nature, nor answer thy sophistry; yet I believe the report the word makes of God: Satan may trouble such an one, but he cannot hurt him: nay, it is probable he will not long trouble him. The devil's antipathy is so great to the word that he loves not to hear it sound in his ear; but if thou throwest down the shield of the word, and thinkest by the dint or force of thy reason to cut thy way through the temptation thou mayest soon see thyself surrounded by thy subtle enemy, and put beyond an honourable retreat. This is the cause, I conceive, why, among those few which have professed themselves atheists, most of them have been great pretenders to reason: such as have neglected the word, and gone forth in the pride of their own understanding, by which (through the righteous judgment of God) they at last have disputed themselves into atheism. While they have turned their backs upon God and his word, and thought, by digging into the secrets and bowels of nature, to be admired for their knowledge above others, that hath befallen them which sometimes does to those in mines, who delve too far into the bowels of the earth—a damp from God's secret judgment hath come to put out that light which at first they carried down with them; and so, that of the apostle is verified on them, 'Where is the disputer of the world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?' 1 Cor. i. 20. Indeed, it is the wisdom of God, that the world, by wisdom, should not know God. Thirdly, he that assents to this truth, there is a God merely upon grounds of reason, and not of faith, and rests in that he doth not quench the temptation, for still he is an infidel, and a Scripture atheist: he doth not believe there is a God, at the report of God's word, but at the report of his reason, and so indeed he doth believe but himself, and not God, and in that makes himself a god, preferring the testimony of his own reason before the testimony of God's word, which is dangerous.

Digitized by Google

But some may say, Is there no use of reason in such principles as this, which are within its sphere? May I not make use of my reason to confirm me in this truth, that there is a God? It is beyond all doubt that there is; wherefore else did God set up such a light, if not to guide us? But it must keep its place, and that is to follow faith, not to be the ground of it, or to give law and measure to it. Our faith must not depend on our reason, but our reason on our faith. I am not to believe what the word saith, merely because it agrees with my reason; but believe my reason, because it is suitable to the word. The more perfect light is to rule the less. Now the light of the word which faith follows, is more clear and sure than reason is, or can be; therefore it is written, because man's natural light was so defective. Thou readest in the word, that there is a God, and that he made the world; thy eye of reason sees this also, but thou layest the stress of thy faith on the word, not on thy reason; and so of other truths. The carpenter lays his rule to the timber, and by his eye sees it to be right or crooked; yet it is not the eye, but the rule, which is the measure, without which his eye might fail him. All that I shall say more to such as are annoyed with atheistical injections, is this: fix thy faith strongly on the word, by which thou shalt be able to overcome this Goliath; and when thou art more free and composed, and the storm is over, thou shalt do well to strengthen thy faith what thou canst with thy reason. Let the word (like David's stone) in the sling of faith, first prostrate the temptation, and then, as he used Goliath's sword to cut off his head, so mayest thou, with more ease and safety, make use of thy reason to complete the victory over these atheistical suggestions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF TEMPTATIONS TO BLASPHEMY, AND HOW FAITH QUENCHETH THEM, AND DEFEATS SATAN'S DOUBLE DESIGN.

THE second fiery dart with which he affrights the Christian, is his temptation to blasphemy. Every sin, in a large sense, is blasphemy; but here we take it more strictly. When a man does, speaks, or thinks anything derogatory to the holy nature or works of God, with an intent to reproach him or his ways, this properly is blasphemy. Job's wife was the devil's solicitor, to provoke her husband to this sin: 'Curse God,' said she, 'and die.' The devil was so impudent as to assault Christ himself with this sin, when he bade him fall down and worship him; but he hath an advantage of making a nearer approach to a saint than he had to Christ. All that he could do to him, was to offend his holy ear with an external motion. It would not stand with the dignity or holiness of Christ's person to let him come any farther; but he can shoot this fiery dart into the imagination of a saint, to the great disturbance of his thoughts, endeavouring thereby to stir up some unworthy thoughts of God in him; though these commonly are no more welcome to a gracious soul, than the frogs which crept into the bed-chamber of Pharaoh were to him. Two things Satan aims at by these injections:

First, To make the saint defame God, which he loves to hear; but if this fail, then he is content to play a lower game, and intends the Christian's vexation, by forcing these unwelcome guests upon him. Now faith, and only faith, can quench these fire-balls in both respects. Faith is able to defeat Satan's first plot, by keeping the soul from entertaining any unbecoming or blasphemous thoughts of God, and none but faith can do this. There is a natural disposition in every wicked man to blaspheme God. Let God but cross a carnal wretch in his way, and then suffer Satan to edge his corruption, and he will soon fly in God's face. If the devil's supposition had been true, that Job was a hypocrite, then that tale which he brought against him to God, would have been true also: 'Put forth now thy hand, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face,' Job i. 11. Had Job been the man he took him for, the devil had not lied; because it is natural for every wicked man to have base thoughts of God; and when provoked, the inward rancour of his heart will appear in the foulness of his tongue. 'This evil is of the Lord: what should I wait for the Lord any longer?' 2 Kings vi. 33; a loud blasphemy, the seed of which is found in every unbeliever. There is but one spirit of wickedness in sinners, as but one spirit of grace in saints. Peter tells Simon Magus, he was 'in the gall of

Digitized by Google

bitterness,' Acts viii. 23; that is, in a state of sin. Every unbeliever hath a bitter spirit against God, and all that bears his name. There is no trusting the tamest of them all. Let the lion out of his cage, and he will soon shew his bloody nature. An unbeliever hath no more in him to quench such a temptation than dry wood hath to quench fire. But now let us see what exploits faith can do in quenching this fiery dart, and how it does it. First, Faith sets God before the soul, within sight and hearing of all its thoughts and ways; and this keeps the soul in awe, that it dares harbour nothing unworthy of God in its most secret thoughts. David gives the reason why the wicked are so bold, Psa. lxxxvi. 14: 'they have not set thee before them.' Such as defame and asperse the names of others, do it commonly behind their backs. Sin in this life seldom comes to such a ripeness, as to blaspheme God to his face; this is properly the language of hell. There is a mixture of atheism with the blasphemy of sinners while on earth. They do with God as those wretched miscreants did with Christ, they cover his face, and then smite him; they draw a curtain of atheistical principles between God and them, and then belch out their blasphemies against that God, whose omniscience they do not believe. Now faith sees God eyeing the soul, and so preserves it. 'Curse not the king,' saith Solomon, 'no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter,' Eccles. x. 20. Such kind of language faith useth. Blaspheme not, saith faith, O my soul, the God of heaven; thou canst not whisper it so softly, but the voice is heard in his ear, who is nearer to thee than thou to thyself: and thus it breaks the snare the devil lays. Those unbecoming speeches which dropped from Job's mouth, through the length and extremity of his troubles, though they did not amount to blasphemy, yet when God presented himself to him in his majesty, they soon vanished, and he covered his face with shame before the Lord for them: 'Now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' Job xlii. 5, 6. Secondly, Faith credits no report of God, but from God's own mouth, and thus it quencheth temptations to blasphemy. It is impossible a soul should have any but holy and loyal thoughts of God, who shapes his apprehensions of him by the word, which is the only true glass to behold God in, because it alone presents him like himself in all his attributes, which Satan by this sin of blasphemy one way or other asperses. Faith conceives its notions of God by the word, resolves all cases of conscience, and deciphers all providences (which God writes in mysterious figures) by the word, for want of which skill Satan drives the creature very often to have hard thoughts of God, because he cannot make presently good sense of his administrations in the world. Thus there have been some who foolishly have charged God's justice, because some outrageous sinners have not been overtaken with such speedy judgment as they deserve; others have charged as deeply his care and faithfulness, in providing no better for his servants, whom they have seen kept long under the hatches of great afflictions: like him who seeing a company of Christians in poor ragged clothes, said, he would not serve that God, who kept his servants no better. These and such like are the broken glasses that Satan presents God in, which disfigure him to the creature's eye; and truly, if we will look no father, but judge God to be what he appears to be by them, we shall soon condemn the Holy One, and be within the whirl of this dangerous temptation. Thirdly, Faith quenches temptations to blasphemy, as it is full of praise. It disposeth the Christian to bless God in the saddest condition that can befall it. Now blessing and blasphemy are most contrary; by the one we think and speak evil, and by the other, good of God, and therefore they cannot well dwell under the same roof; they are like contrary tunes, they cannot be played on the same instrument without changing all the strings. It is past Satan's skill to strike so harsh a stroke as blasphemy is, on a soul tuned and set to praise God; no faith doth this. 'My heart is fixed,' saith David: there was his faith; then follows, 'I will sing and give praise,' Psa. lvii. 7. It was faith that tuned his spirit, and set his affections praising. And would not Satan, think you, have found it a hard task to make David blaspheme God, while his heart was kept in a praising frame? Now two ways faith doth this: first, as it seeth mercy in the greatest affliction, an eye of comfort in the saddest mixture of providence; so when the devil provokes to blasphemy from

Digitized by Google

the evil that the creature receives from God, faith shows more good received than evil. Thus Job quenched this dart, which Satan shot at him from his wife's tongue: 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall not we receive evil?' Shall a few present troubles be a grave to bury the remembrance of all my past and present mercies? 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women.' What God takes from me is less than I owe him; but what he leaves me is more than he owes me. Solomon bids us, 'in the day of adversity consider.' Our unbecoming thoughts and words of God are the produce of a rash, hasty spirit. Now faith is a considering grace; he that believes will not make haste; no, not to think or speak of God. Faith hath a good memory, and can tell the Christian many stories of ancient mercies; and when his present meal falls short, it can entertain the soul with a cold dish, and not complain that God keeps a bad house. Thus David recovered himself, when he was even tumbling down the hill of temptation: 'This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High; I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old,' Psa. lxxvii. 10, 11. Therefore, Christian, when thou art in thy depths of affliction, and Satan tempts thee to asperse God, as if he were forgetful of thee, stop his mouth with this: No, Satan, God hath not forgot to do for me, but I have forgot what he hath done for me, or else I could not question his fatherly care at present over me. Go, Christian, play over thy own lessons, praise God for past mercies, and it will not be long before thou hast a new song put into thy mouth for a present mercy. Secondly, As faith espies mercy in every affliction, so it holds an expectation in the soul for more; which confidence disposeth the soul to praise God as if the mercy were then in being. Daniel, when in the very shadow of death, the plot being laid to take away his life, three times a day he prayed, and gave thanks before his God, Dan. vi. 10. To have heard him pray in that great strait would not have afforded so much matter of wonder; but to have his heart in tune for giving thanks in such a sad hour was admirable. Mercy in the promise is as the apple in the seed; faith sees it growing up—the mercy coming. Now a soul under expectation of deliverance will scorn a blasphemous thought. When relief is known to be on its way for a garrison besieged, it raiseth their spirits; they will not then hearken to the traitorous proposal of the enemy. It is when unbelief is the counsellor, and the soul under doubts and suspicions of God's disposition toward it, that Satan finds welcome upon such an errand: an excellent instance of both we have in Isaiah viii.; we find, verse 17, what is the effect of faith, and that is a cheerful waiting on God in difficulties: 'I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him;' and, ver. 21, we have the fruit of unbelief, and that is no less than blasphemy: 'And it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward.' Faith keeps the believer in a waiting posture; and unbelief sets the sinner cursing both God and man. None escapes his lash that crosses him in his way; no, not God himself. Fourthly, Faith quenches this fiery dart by purifying the heart of that enmity against God, which, in man's corrupt nature, is fuel for such a temptation. 'Backbiters, haters of God,' and 'despiteful,' are joined together, Rom. i. 30. No wonder that a man whose spirit is full of rancour against another should be easily persuaded to revile him whom he hates so much. Every unbeliever is a hater of God, and so he is in a disposition to blaspheme God when his will or lust is crossed by God; but faith slays this enmity of the heart, yea, it works love in the soul to God, and then works by this love. Now, it is one property of love 'to think no evil,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5; that is, a man will neither plot any evil against him whom he loves, nor easily suspect any evil to be plotted by him against himself. Love reads the actions of a friend through such clear spectacles of candour as will make a dark print seem a fair character; she interprets all he doth with so much sweetness and simplicity, that those passages in his behaviour towards her, which to another would seem intricate and suspicious, are plain and pleasing to her, because she ever puts the most favourable sense upon all he doeth. The believer dares not himself plot any sin against God, whom he loves so dearly. And as love will not suffer him to turn traitor against a good God, so neither will it suffer him to harbour any jealous thoughts of God's heart towards him; as if he who was the first lover, and taught the soul to

Digitized by Google

love him by making love to it, could, after all this, frame any plot of real unkindness against it. No; this thought, though Satan may force it in a manner upon the Christian, and violently press for its entertainment under the advantage of some frowning providence, yet it can never find welcome so far as to be credited in the soul where love to God hath anything to do. And surely there is no fear that the soul will be persuaded wickedly to throw out blasphemies against God, who so abominates the least suspicion of God in its most secret thoughts.

The second design Satan hath in these blasphemous temptations is the Christian's trouble and vexation. Though he doth not find the Christian so kind as to take these guests in and give them lodgings, yet he knows it will not a little disturb and break his rest to have them continually knocking at his door; yea, when he cannot pollute the Christian by obtaining his consent to them, then he hopes to create him no little disquiet by accusing him for what he will not commit; and so of a defiler he is forced to turn slanderer, reviler, and false accuser. Thus the whore sometimes accuseth the honest man, merely to be revenged on him, because he will not yield to satisfy her lust. Joseph would not lie with his mistress, and she invented a horrible lie on him. The devil is the blasphemer; but the poor Christian, because he will not join with him in the fact, shall have the name and bear the blame of it. As the Jews compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry Christ's cross, so Satan would compel the tempted Christian to carry the guilt of his sin for him; and many times he doth with such sleight of hand shift it from himself to the Christian's back, that he, poor creature, perceives not the juggler's art of conveying it unto him, but goes complaining only of the baseness of his own heart: and, as it sometimes falls out that an honest man, in whose house stolen goods are found, suffers because he cannot find the thief who left them, so the Christian suffers many sad terrors from the mere presence of these horrid thoughts in his bosom, because he is not able to say whose they are,—whether shot in by Satan, or the steaming forth of his own wicked heart. The humble Christian is prone to fear the worst of himself, even where he is not conscious of being guilty; like the patriarchs, who, when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, took the blame to themselves, though they were innocent in the fact; and such is the confusion sometimes in the Christian's thoughts, that he is ready to charge himself with those brats that should be laid at Satan's door. Now, here I shall show you how faith defeateth this second design of the devil in these blasphemous motions; and this it doth in two ways; first, by helping the Christian to discern Satan's injections from the motions of his own heart; secondly, by succouring him, though they rise from his own heart.

First, Faith teaches the Christian to distinguish those fire-balls of temptations, which are thrown in at his window by Satan, from those sparks of corruption which fly from his own hearth, and take fire at his own sinful heart. And, certainly, those blasphemous thoughts, of which many gracious souls make such sad complaint, will be found very often of the former sort, as may appear if we consider the time when they first stir, and are most busy, the manner how they come, and lastly, the effect they have on the Christian's heart. First, The time when they begin to stir, and the soul to be haunted with them; and that is ordinarily when the work of conversion hath newly passed, or is passing, upon him; when the creature falls off from his own sinful course to embrace Christ, and declares for him against sin and Satan. This is the time when these blasphemous suggestions begin to make their appearance. There is a strong probability that they do not breed there, but are sent from Satan by way of revenge for the soul's revolt from him; the devil dealing by the Christian in this not much unlike to witches, who, to express their spite against those that cross them, sometimes cause them to swarm with vermin, to make them loathsome to themselves; and, as one who never found such vermin crawling about him before, might well wonder to see himself so suddenly covered with them, and would rather impute it to the witch's malice than to the corruption of his own body, so in this case, it is very improbable to think that the creature should in this juncture of time, above all, fall so foul with God by sinning against him to such a height as this. Is it likely that he can, while he is in tears for the sins of his past life, commit a greater than any of them which he mourns for? or

Digitized by Google

that he dare, while he is crying for pardoning mercy with a trembling heart, block up the way to his own prayers, and harden God's heart into a denial of them, by such horrid sins as these? In a word, does it not seem strange, that all the while he was a stranger to and an enemy against God, he durst not venture on this sin, for the prodigious nature of it; and that now, when he begins to love God, those blasphemies should fit his mouth which were too big and horrid before for him to meddle with? Secondly, The manner how these blasphemies rise in the Christian's thoughts will increase the probability that they are injections from Satan rather than motions of the Christian's own heart. They are commonly violent and sudden; they come like lightning flashing into the Christian's thoughts before he hath time to deliberate with himself what he is doing; whereas that lust which is the ebullition of our own hearts is ordinarily gradual in its motion; it moves in a way more still and suitable to man's nature; it doth entice the soul, and by degrees inveigles it into a consent, bringing first the affections on its side, which then it employeth to corrupt the understanding, and take it off from appearing against it by putting its eye out with some bribe of sensual pleasure and profit, and so by these paces it comes at last to have a more easy access to, and success over, the will, which, being now deprived of her guard, yields the sooner to the summons which lust makes. But these sudden dartings of blasphemous thoughts make a forcible entry upon the soul without any application used to gain its good will to come in; their driving is like the driving of that hellish Jehu, it is the devil that is got upon the box; who else could drive so furiously? Yea, not only their suddenness and violence, but incoherence with the Christian's former thoughts and course, do still heighten the probability that they are darts shot from the devil's bow. Peter was once known to be of Christ's company by his voice: 'Thy speech,' say they, 'betrayeth thee;' he spake like them, and therefore was judged one of them. On the contrary, we may say of these blasphemous motions, they are not the Christian's; their language betrays them to be rather the belchings of a devil than the voice of a saint. If they were woven by the soul, they would be something like the whole piece from which they are cut off. There is ordinarily a dependency in our thoughts; we take the hint from one thought for another; as circle riseth out of circle in the moved water, so does thought out of thought, till they spread into a discourse. Now, may not the Christian well wonder to see, may be when he is at the worship of God, and taken up with holy and heavenly meditations, a blasphemous thought on a sudden appearing in the midst of such company, to which it is so great a stranger, and also how it could get in among them? If a holy thought surpriseth us on a sudden, when we stand, as it were, with our back on heaven, and there be nothing in the discourse which our hearts at present are holding to usher it in, we may take it as the pure motion of the Spirit of Christ. Who, indeed, but he could be so soon in the midst of the soul, when the door is shut, even before the creature can turn his thoughts to open it for him? And probably these blasphemies which rush upon thee, O Christian, at a time when thy soul is at the farthest distance from such thoughts, yea, sailing to the contrary point, in thy praying to and praising of God, are the eruptions of that wicked one, and that on purpose to interrupt thee in that work, which of all other he fears and hates most. Thirdly, The effect these blasphemous motions have on the heart may make us think they are Satan's brats, rather than the birth of the Christian's own heart; and that is a dismal horror and consternation of the Christian's spirit, which reacheth often to the discomposure of the body; so that an apparition of the devil to their bodily eyes could not affright them more than these blasphemies do, who walk in their imagination. Yea, they do not only cause an horror, but stir up a vehement indignation and abhorrence in the soul at their presence. If now they be the birth of the Christian's own heart, why this horror,—whence this indignation? These motions which arise from ourselves use to please us better. It is natural for men to love the children of their own loins, though black and deformed, and as natural to like the conceptions of their own minds. Solomon found out the true mother, by her tenderness to the child. If these blasphemies were the issue of the heart, familiarity with them might be expected, rather than horror at the sight of them; favour to them rather than abhorrence of them. Were it not more likely, pour soul, that thou wouldst kiss them, if thy own, than seek

Digitized by Google

to kill them; draw out thy breast to nurse and suckle them, than the sword of the Spirit to destroy them? And if so, saith faith, that these be Satan's brats, why then art thou troubled because he lays them at thy door? Is the chaste woman unchaste because some foul tongue calls her so? Have patience a little, poor soul, the Judge is at the door, and when he comes thou shalt be called by thy right name. Sit not thou any longer wounding thy soul with his dart, and troubling thyself for the devil's sin, but go and complain of him to thy God; and when thou hast spread his blasphemies before the Lord, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's comfort thyself with this, that God will spread thy cause against this false accuser, and send him away with as much shame, and as little success, as he did that barking dog, who so reviled God, and railed on his people.

But, secondly, suppose these blasphemous motions be the Christian's own sins, bred in his own heart, and not the devil's brats, yet here faith relieves the Christian, when distressed with the guilt of them, and Satan labours most to aggravate them. Now the succour faith brings the soul here is manifold. Faith can assure the soul, upon solid Scripture bottoms, that these blasphemous thoughts are pardonable: 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men,' Matt. xii. 31. And it were strange, if thy fancy should be so wild and melancholy, as to think thou seest this only unpardonable blasphemy (which is marked on the forehead with final impenitency and desperate hatred against God) in those loose, roving thoughts, that never yet could gain any consent from thy heart, but continues to disavow and protest against them; I say, it were very strange that thou couldst long mistake those unwelcome guests for that wicked sin. Now, for thy comfort, thou hearest that all manner of blasphemy, except that one, shall be forgiven; a pardon for them may be sued out in the court of mercy, how terrible and amazing soever their circumstances may be to thy trembling soul; and if the creature believes this, Satan's dart is quenched; for his design is to make use of these temptations as a trap-door by which he may let thy soul down into despair. Faith resolves the soul that the ebullition of such thoughts is not inconsistent with the state of grace; and if the soul be well satisfied in this point, the devil's fiery dart hath lost its envenomed head, so that it cannot drink up the Christian's spirits. The common inference which he makes tempted souls draw from the presence of these thoughts is, Surely I am not a saint; this is not the spot of God's children; but faith is able to disprove this, and challenges Satan to show one place in all the Bible that countenanceth such a conclusion. Indeed there is not one. It is true, the blasphemy of blasphemies (I mean the sin against the Holy Ghost), with this the evil one shall never touch a true believer; but I know no kind of sin, short of that, from which he hath any such protection or immunity, as makes it impossible he should for a time be foiled by it. The whole body of sin, indeed, is weakened in every believer, and a deadly wound given by the grace of God to his corrupt nature; yet as a dying tree may bear some fruit, though not so much, nor that so full and ripe as before; as a dying man may move his limbs, though not so strongly as when he was in health; so original corruption in a saint will be stirring, though but feebly; and thou hast no cause to be discouraged because it stirs, but to be comforted that it can but stir. O be thankful thou hast got thy enemy, who was master of the field, and had thee tied to his triumphant chariot, now himself on his knees under the victorious sword of Christ and his grace, ready to drop into his grave, though lifting up his hand against thee, to show his enmity continues, when his power fails to do execution. Faith can clear it to the soul, that these blasphemous thoughts, as they are commonly entertained in a saint, are not such great sins in God's account, as some other that pass for less in ours. The Christian commonly contracts more guilt by a few proud, unclean, covetous thoughts, than by many blasphemous, because the Christian seldom gets so clear a victory over those, as over these of blasphemy. The fiery darts of blasphemy may scare the Christian more, but fiery lusts wound sooner and deeper. The warm sun made the traveller open his cloak, but the blustering wind made him wrap it closer to him. Temptations of pleasure entice the heart, whereas the horrid nature of the other stirs up the Christian to a more valiant resistance of them. O the Christian is soon overtaken with temptations of pleasure,—they are like

Digitized by Google

poison in sweet wine, they are down before he is aware, and do diffuse apace in his affections, poisoning the Christian's spirits, but those of blasphemy are like poison in some bitter potion; either it is spit out before it is down, or vomited by the Christian before it hath spread itself far into his affections. Sins are great or small by the share the will hath in the acting of them; and blasphemous thoughts, commonly having less of the Christian's will and affections in them than the other, cannot be a greater sin. Faith tells the soul that God hath gracious ends in suffering him to be haunted with such troublesome guests, or they should not be quartered on him. Possibly God saw some other sin, which thou wert in great danger of, and he sends Satan to trouble thee with these temptations, that he may not overcome thee with the other; and though a plaster may be very offensive and loathsome, yet it is better to endure that awhile, than a disease which will hazard thy life. Better tremble at the sight of blasphemous thoughts, than strut thyself in the pride of thy heart at the sight of thy gifts and privileges. The first will make thee think thyself as vile as the devil himself in thy own eyes; but the other will make thee prodigously wicked, and so like the devil in God's eyes. Faith will put the Christian on some noble exploits for God, thereby to vindicate himself, and prove the devil's charge a lie, as one that is accused of some traitorous design against his prince, to wipe off that calumny, doth undertake some notable enterprise for honour. This, indeed, is the fullest revenge the Christian can take, either of Satan for troubling him with such injections, or his own heart for issuing out such impure streams. When David preferred Saul's life in the cave above a kingdom, which one hearty blow might have procured him, he proved all his enemies liars that had brought him under a suspicion at court. Thus, Christian, do thou by the honour of God, when it cometh in competition with sin and self; and thou wilt stop the devil's mouth, who sometimes is ready to make thee jealous of thyself, as if thou wert a blasphemer. Such heroic acts of zeal and self-denial would speak more for thy purgation before God and thy own conscience than these sudden thoughts can do against thee.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE THIRD FIERY DART OF DESPAIR, AND THE CHIEF ARGUMENT WHICH SATAN URGETH MOST UPON SOULS, TO DRIVE THEM INTO IT, (TAKEN FROM THE GREATNESS OF SIN,) REFUTED; AS ALSO THE FIRST ANSWER WITH WHICH FAITH FURNISHETH THE SOUL FOR THIS PURPOSE.

THE third fiery dart which Satan lets fly at the Christian is his temptation to despair. This cursed fiend thinks he can neither revenge himself farther on God, nor engrave his own image deeper on the creature, than by this sin, which at once casteth the greatest scorn upon God, and brings the creature nearer the complexion of devils and damned souls; who, by lying continually under the scorching wrath of God in hell, are black with despair. This is the sin Satan chiefly aims at; other sins are but as previous dispositions to introduce that, and make the creature more receptive for such a temptation. As the wool hath a tincture of some lighter colour given it before it can be dyed into a deep grain, so Satan hath his more lightsome and pleasant sins, which he at first entices the creature to, that he may the better dispose him for this. The devil is too cunning a fowler to lay his net in the bird's sight; despair is the net, other sins are but the bait, whereby he lures them in. This, above all sins, puts a man into a kind of actual possession of hell. Other sins bind over to wrath, but this gives fire to the threatening, and sets the soul in a flame with horror. As it is faith's excellency to give a being to the word of promise; so it is the cruelty of despair to give an existence to the torments of hell in the conscience. This is the arrow which drinks up the spirits, and makes the creature executioner to itself. Despair puts a soul beyond all relief; the offer of a pardon comes too late to him that hath turned himself off the ladder. Other temptations have their way to escape; faith and hope can open a window to let out the smoke that offends the Christian in any condition; but the soul must needs be choked, when it is shut up within the despairing thoughts of its own sins, and no crevice of hope left, to be an outlet to any of that horror with which they fill him.

SECTION I.—I might here instance those many arguments which Satan useth to bring souls into despair, and how able faith, and only faith, is to

Digitized by Google

answer and repel them; but I shall content myself with one, which is the chief of all Satan's strength, and that is taken from the greatness and multitude of the creature's sin, which, when it is enlightened to see, and hath the brawniness of its conscience pared off, and made to feel with remorse, then if God but allows Satan to use his rhetoric in declaiming against the heinousness of sin, the poor creature must needs be in a doleful condition, and of necessity sink into the depths of despair, for all the help it can find from itself within, or any other creature without. Perhaps some of you, who have slight thoughts of your own sins, think it proves but a childish spirit in others, to be so troubled for theirs; and in this you shew that you never were in Satan's stocks, pinched by his temptations: those who have, will speak in another language, and tell you, that the sins which are unfelt by you, have pressed like a mountain of lead upon their spirits. O! when a breach is once made in the conscience, and the waves of guilt pour over the soul, it soon overtops all the creature's shifts and apologies, as the flood did the old world. As nothing then was visible but sea and heaven, so in such a soul, nothing but sin and hell: his sins stare him in the face, as with the eyes of so many devils, ready to drag him into the bottomless pit; every silly fly dares creep upon the lion while asleep, at whose voice all the beasts in the forest tremble when awake. Fools can make a mock of sin, when conscience's eye is out; they can then dance about it, as the Philistines did about blind Samson; but when God arms sin with guilt, and causeth this serpent to put forth its sting upon the conscience, then the proudest sinner flies before it. Now it is faith alone that can grapple with sin in its strength: which it doth in several ways.

SECTION II.—Faith gives the soul a view of the great God. It teacheth the soul to set his almightiness against sin's magnitude, and his infinitude against sin's multitude; and so quencheth the temptation. The reason why the presumptuous sinner fears so little, and the despairing soul so much, is for want of knowing God as great; therefore, to cure them both, the serious consideration of God, under this notion, is propounded, Psalm xlvi. 10, 'Be still and know that I am God:' as if he had said, Know, O ye wicked, that I am God, who can avenge myself when I please upon you, and cease to provoke me by your sins to your own confusion. Again, Know, ye trembling souls, that I am God; and, therefore, able to pardon the greatest sins, and cease to dishonour me by your unbelieving thoughts of me. Now faith alone can thus show God to be God. Two things are required to the right conception of God. First, We must give him the infinitude of all his attributes; that is, conceive of him not only as wise, for that may be a man's name, but infinitely wise; not mighty, but almighty, &c. Secondly, This infinitude which we give to God, we must deny to all besides him. Now faith alone can realize and fix this principle so in the heart, that the creature shall act suitably thereunto: indeed, there are none so wicked, who will not say, (if you will believe them,) that they believe God is infinite in his knowledge, and omnipresent, at their heels wherever they go: infinite in his power; needing no more to effect their ruin than his speaking it: but would they then in the view of these go and sin so boldly? They durst as well run their heads into a fiery oven, as do it in the face of such a principle. So others believe God is infinite in mercy; but would they then carry a hell flaming in their bosoms with despair, while they have infinite mercy in their eye? No; it is plain God appears not in his true greatness to such. Despair robs God of his infinitude, and ascribes it to sin: by it the creature saith his sin is infinite, and God is not; too like those unbelieving Israelites, Psa. cvi. 7, 'They remembered not the multitude of his mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the red sea;' they could not see enough in God to serve their turn at such a strait; they saw a multitude of Egyptians to kill, and multitudes of waters to drown them, but could not see multitude enough of mercies to deliver them. Thus the despairing soul sees a multitude of great sins to damn, but not an infinitude of mercy in the great God to save him. Reason, alas! is low of stature, like Zaccheus, and cannot see mercy in a crowd of sins. It is faith alone that climbs the promise; then, and not till then, will the soul see Jesus; faith ascribes mercy to God with an overplus; Isaiah lv. 7, 'He will abundantly pardon:' multiply to pardon,—so the Hebrew. He will drop pardons with our sins, 'He will subdue our iniquities,

Digitized by Google

and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' This is faith's language; he will pardon with an overflowing mercy. Cast a stone into the sea, and it is not barely covered, but buried many fathoms deep. God will pardon thy greatest sins, saith faith, as the sea doth a little pebble. A few sins poured out upon the conscience, like a pail of water spilled on the ground, seems a great flood: but the greatest poured into the sea of God's mercy, are swallowed up, and not seen. Thus when 'the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for,' the Scripture saith, 'there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, they shall not be found; for I will pardon,' Jer. 1. 20.

SECTION III.—O, but, saith the trembling soul, the consideration of God's infinitude, especially in two of his attributes, drives me fastest to despair. When I think how infinitely holy God is, may I not fear what will become of me, an unholy wretch? When again I look upon him as just, yea, infinitely just, how can I think he will remit such great wrongs as I have done to his glorious name? Faith will, and none but faith's fingers can, untie this knot, and give the soul a satisfactory answer to this question concerning the holiness of God. Faith hath two things to answer: First, that though the infinite holiness of God's nature doth make him vehemently hate sin, yet the same doth strongly incline his heart to show mercy to sinners. What is it in the creature that makes him hard-hearted but sin? 'The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,' Prov. xii. 10: if wicked, then cruel; and the more holy the more merciful. Hence it is that acts of mercy and forgiveness are with so much difficulty drawn from those that are saints, because there are remains of corruption in them, which cause some to have hardness of heart, and unwillingness to that work. 'Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good,' saith the apostle, Rom. xii. 21; implying that it is hard work, which cannot be done till a victory be got over the Christian's own heart, who hath contrary passions, and will strongly oppose such an act. How oft, alas! do we hear such language as this, from those that are gracious!—My patience is spent,—I can bear no longer, and forgive no more; but God, who is purity without dross, holiness without the least mixture of sin, hath nothing to sour his heart, into any unmercifulness. 'If ye, being evil, saith Christ, 'know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?' Matt. vii. 11. Christ's design in this place, is to help them to larger apprehensions concerning the mercifulness of God's heart; in order to which, he directs them to the thoughts of his holiness, as that which would infallibly demonstrate the same. As if Christ had said, Can you persuade your hearts (distempered with sinful passions) to be kind to your children? How much more easy is it to think, that God, who is holiness itself, will be so to his poor creatures, prostrate at his feet for mercy! Secondly, Faith can tell the soul, that the holiness of God is no enemy to pardoning mercy; for it is the holiness of God that obligeth him to be faithful in all his promises; and this, indeed, is as full a breast of consolation as any I know, to a poor trembling soul. When the doubting soul reads those many precious promises which are made to returning sinners, why doth he not take comfort in them? Surely, it is because the truth and faithfulness of God to perform them is yet under some dispute in his soul. Now, the strongest argument that faith hath to put this question out of doubt, and make the sinner accept the promise as a true and faithful word, is that which is taken from the holiness of God, who is the promise-maker. The promise must be true, (saith faith,) because a holy God makes it, therefore God, to gain the more credit to the truth of his promise in the thoughts of his people, prefixeth so often this attribute to his promise; 'I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the holy One of Israel:' Isa. xli. 14. Indeed, the mercies of God are founded in holiness, and therefore are sure mercies. The reason of man's unfaithfulness in promises proceeds from some unholiness in his heart; the more holy a man is, the more faithful we may expect him to be; a good man will be as good as his word; and so you may be sure a good God will. How many times did Laban change Jacob's wages, after promise? But God's covenent with him was inviolably kept, though Jacob was not so faithful on his part as he ought to have been: and why, but because he had to do with a holy God in this, but with a sinful man in the other whose passions altered his thoughts and changed his countenance toward him.

Digitized by Google

We come to the second attribute, which scares the tempted soul, and seems so little to befriend this pardoning act of God's mercy; and that is justice, which proves often matter of amazement to the awakened sinner, rather than encouragement, especially when the serious thought of it possesses his heart. Indeed, the naked consideration of this attribute, and the musing on it, without a gospel comment, through which alone it can be safely and comfortably viewed by a sin-smitten soul, must needs dispirit him, yea, kindle a fire of horror in his bosom: for the creature seeing no way that God hath to vindicate his provoked justice, but by the eternal destruction and damnation of the sinner, cannot without an universal consternation of all the powers of his soul, think of that attribute, which brings to his thoughts so fearful an expectation and looking-for of judgment. Heman, though a holy man, yet even lost his wits with musing on this subject, Psa. lxxxviii. 15, 16: 'While I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted.' But faith can make good work of this also; faith will enable the soul to walk in this fiery attribute, with his comforts unsinged, as those three worthies (Dan. iii.) did in the flaming furnace; while unbelieving sinners are scorched, yea, swallowed up into despair, when they do but come in their thoughts near the mouth of it. There is a threefold consideration with which faith relieves the soul when the terror of this attribute takes hold of it.

SECTION IV.—First, Faith shews, upon the best evidence, that God may pardon the greatest sinner, if penitent and believing, without the least prejudice to his justice. Secondly, Faith goes farther, and shews, that God in pardoning the believing sinner, doth not only save his justice, but advance the honour of it. Thirdly, That God doth not only save and advance his justice in pardoning a believing soul, but (as things stand now) he hath no other way to secure his justice, but by pardoning the believing soul his sins, be they never so great. These three well digested, will render this attribute as amiable, lovely, and comfortable to the thoughts of a believer, as that of mercy itself.

First, Faith shews, upon the best evidence, that God may pardon its sins, though never so great, with safety to the justice of God. That question is not now to be disputed, whether God can be just and righteous in pardoning sinners. This, saith faith, was debated and determined long ago, at the council-board of heaven by God himself. God expresseth thus much in the promise, Hosea ii. 19: 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in judgment.' Who is this that God means to marry? One that had played the harlot, as appears by the former part of the chapter. What doth he mean by betrothing? No other, but that he will pardon their sins, and receive them into the arms of his love and peculiar favour. But how can the righteous God take one that hath been a filthy strumpet into his bosom,—betroth such a whorish people, pardon such high climbing sin? How? Mark,—'He will do it in judgment and in righteousness.' As if God had said, Trouble not your thoughts to clear my justice in the act; I know what I do; the case is well weighed by me. It is not like the sudden matches that are huddled up by men in one day, and repented of the next: but is the result of the counsel of my holy will.' Now when Satan comes full mouth against the believer with this objection, What, such a wretch as thou find favour in the eyes of God! Faith can easily retort, Yes, Satan, God can be as righteous in pardoning me, as in damning thee. God tells me, it is in judgment and in righteousness. I leave thee therefore to dispute this case out with God, who is able to justify his own act. Now, though this were enough to repel Satan, yet faith is provided with a more particular evidence, for the vindication of the justice and righteousness of God in this his pardoning act. And this is founded on the full satisfaction which Christ hath given to God for all the wrong the believer hath done by his sin. Indeed, it was the great undertaking of Christ to bring justice to kiss mercy; that there might not be a dissenting attribute in God when this vote should pass, but the act of pardoning mercy might be carried clear, *nullo contradicente*. Therefore Christ, before he solicits the sinner's cause with God by request, performs first the other of satisfaction by sacrifice. He pays, and then prays for what he hath paid: presenting his petition in the behalf of believing sinners, written with his own blood, that so justice might not disdain to read or grant it. I will not dispute, whether God could by prerogitive mercy (without a satisfaction) have issued out an act of pardon; but in this way of satisfaction, the righteous-

Digitized by Google

ness of God, I am sure, may be vindicated in the conscience of the greatest sinner on earth; yea, the devil himself is but a faint disputant, when faith pinches him with this argument: it is a trench which he is not able to climb. Indeed, God laid out salvation in this method, that even we weak ones might be able to justify him, in justifying us, to the most malicious devil in hell. Peruse that incomparable place, which hath balm enough in it to heal the wounds of all the bleeding consciences in the world, where there is but faith to drop it in, and for ever to quench the fire of this dart, which is headed with the justice of God: 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' Rom. iii. 24—26. O, what work will faith make of this scripture! A soul castled within these walls is impregnable. First, observe, Christ is here called 'a propitiation,' or if you will, 'a propitiatory,' alluding to the mercy-seat, where God promised to meet his people, that he might converse with them, and no dread from his majesty fall upon them, Exod. xxv. Now, you know, the mercy-seat was placed over the ark, to be a cover thereunto, it being the ark wherein the holy law of God was kept, from the violation of which all the fears of a guilty soul arise; therefore it is observable, that the dimensions of the one was proportioned to the other. The mercy-seat was to be as long and broad to the full as the ark, that no part thereof might be unshadowed by it; verse 10, compared with verse 17. Thus, Christ, our true 'Propitiatory,' covers all the law, which else would come in to accuse the believer; but not one threatening now can arrest him, so long as this screen remains for faith to interpose between God's wrath and the soul. Justice now hath no mark to level at; God cannot see the sinner, because Christ hides him. This is not the man, saith wrath, that I am to strike. See how he flies to Christ, and takes sanctuary in his satisfaction, and so is got out of my walk and reach, that being a privileged place, where I must not come to arrest any. It is usual, you know, in battle to wear a ribband, handkerchief, or some such thing, to distinguish friends from foes. Christ's satisfaction, worn by faith, is the sign that distinguisheth God's friends from his enemies. The scarlet thread on Rahab's window, kept the destroying sword out of her house: and the blood of Christ pleaded by faith, will keep the soul from receiving any hurt at the hands of Divine justice.

Secondly, Observe, what hand Christ hath his commission from—'whom God hath set forth, to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Christ, we see, is the great ordinance of heaven; him the Father hath sealed; he is singled out from all others, angels and men, and set forth as the person chosen of God, to make atonement for sinners, as the Lamb was taken out of the flock, and set apart for the passover. When, therefore, Satan sets forth the believer's sins in battle array against him, and confronts him with their greatness; then faith runs under the shelter of this rock. Surely, saith faith, my Saviour is infinitely greater than my greatest sins. I should impeach the wisdom of God, to think otherwise, who knew what a heavy burden he had to lay upon his shoulders, and was fully satisfied of his strength to bear it. He that refused sacrifice and burnt-offering, because of their insufficiency, would not have called him, had he not been all-sufficient for the work. Indeed, here lies the weight of the whole building: a weak faith may save, but a weak Saviour cannot; faith hath Christ to plead for it, but Christ hath none to plead for him: faith leans on Christ's arm, but Christ stood upon his own legs: and if he had sunk under the burden of our sins, he had been past the reach of any creature in heaven or earth to help him up.

Thirdly, Observe the reason why God chose this way of issuing out his pardoning mercy, and that is, to 'declare his righteousness for the remission of sins.' Mark, not to declare his mercy—that is obvious to every eye; every one will believe him merciful who is forgiving; but to conceive how God should be righteous in forgiving sinners, this lies more remote from the creature's apprehensions; and therefore it is repeated, Rom. iii. 26, 'To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus;' as if God had said, I know why it appears so incredible, poor sinners,

Digitized by Google

to your thoughts that I should pardon all your iniquities: you think, because I am a righteous God, that I will sooner damn a thousand worlds of sinners than asperse my justice and bring my name under the least suspicion of unrighteousness; and that thought is most true. I would indeed damn them over and over again rather than stain the honour of my justice, which is myself. But I declare, yea, again I declare it, and command you, and the greatest sinners on earth, upon pain of damnation, to believe it, that I can be just and yet the justifier of those sinners who believe in Jesus. O what boldness may the believer take at this news! Methinks I see the soul that was even now pining to death with despair, and plotting upon hell in his thoughts as one already free among the dead, now revive, and grow young again at these tidings, as Jacob when he heard Joseph was alive. What! is justice (the only enemy I feared, an attribute in God's heart which my thoughts fled from), now become my friend? Then cheer up, my soul! Who shall condemn, if God justifies? And how can God himself be against thee, when his very justice acquits thee?

SECTION V.—But Satan will not thus leave the soul. Dost thou, poor creature, saith he, believe this strange divinity? Is it just for God to pardon thee for the satisfaction that another makes? One man commit the murder, and another man that is innocent hanged for it,—call you this just? The law demands the person sinning to be delivered up to justice; we find no mention of a surety to be allowed by the covenant: 'In the day that thou eatest, thou shalt die.' First, Faith teaches the soul to acquiesce in the declaration that God makes of his own mind. Now, though the threatening at first acquaints us with the sinner's name only, yet faith finds a gracious relaxation of threatening in the gospel covenant, where, to the believer's everlasting comfort, God promiseth to accept the sinner's debt at Christ's hand, whom therefore we find arrested upon our action: Isa. liii. 5, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.' Here is bottom strong enough for faith to rest on; and why should we, shallow creatures, dispute gospel truths, to the confusion of our own thoughts, by thinking to fathom the bottomless depth of God's justice with the short cordage of our reason, which we find confused by the meanest piece in God's work of creation? Faith spies a devil in this beautiful serpent, reason, which for its smooth tongue Satan useth on mischievous designs to undermine, in particular this one most sweet and fundamental truth of the gospel, I mean the satisfaction of Christ; and therefore faith protests against the legality of reason's court. What, indeed! hath reason to call before her lower bench these mysteries of our faith which are purely supernatural, and so not under her cognizance? There are those in this proud age of ours who would wish to go to law, as I may say, with the highest gospel truths before this heathen judge, Reason; whereby they evacuate one great end of the gospel, which is to sacrifice our shallow reason on faith's altar, that so we might give the more signal honour to the truth of God in believing the high mysteries of the gospel upon his naked report of them in the word. Secondly, The believer can clear God as just in receiving the debt at Christ's hand, from the near union which is between Christ and his people. The husband may lawfully be arrested for his wife's debt, because this union is voluntary, and it is to be supposed he did or ought to have considered what her estate was before he contracted so near a relation to her. A suit may justly be commenced against a surety, because it was his own act to engage for the debt. Christ was most free in engaging himself in the sinner's cause. He knew what a sad plight man's nature was in; and he had an absolute freedom in his choice, whether he would leave man to perish, or lend his helping hand towards his recovery; he had also an absolute power of his own life, which no mere creature hath; so that it being his own offer, upon his Father's call, to take our nature in marriage, thereby to interest himself in our debt, and for the payment of it to disburse and pour out his own precious blood to death. How dare proud flesh call the justice of God to the bar, and bring his righteousness in this transaction into question, for which God promised himself the highest expressions of love and thankfulness at his creature's hand?

Secondly, Faith doth not only bear witness to the justice of God, that he may pardon a poor believing sinner, and yet be just, but it shews that he may

Digitized by Google

advance the honour of his justice by pardoning the believing soul more than in damning the impenitent sinner. And surely God had no less design in the gospel covenant than this, that he would not the death of a sinner, but to vindicate his justice. He would not certainly have consented to the death of his only Son, but for the higher advance and farther glorifying of his justice in the eye of his creature. Christ saith he came not only that we sinners might have life, but that we might have it more abundantly,' John x. 10; that is, more abundantly than we should have inherited it from innocent Adam. May we not therefore say that Christ did not die that God might only have his due debt, but that he might have it more abundantly paid by Christ than he could have had at the creature's hand? But more particularly the justice of God will appear here clothed with four glorious circumstances, that cannot be found in the payment which the sinner by his own personal sufferings makes unto it. First, If we consider the person at whose hand Divine justice receives satisfaction. When the sinner is damned for his own sins, it is but a poor sorry creature that is punished; but when Christ suffereth, the debt is paid by a more honourable hand; God hath it from one that is near to himself, yea, equal with himself. 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts,' Zech. xiii. 7. Who will not say a judge gives more eminent testimony of his justice when he condemns his own son than when he arraigns a stranger? Here God indeed declared his utmost hatred of sin, and inflexible love of justice, in that he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all. Secondly, If we consider the manner in which the debt is paid. When the sinner is damned, it is in a poor beggarly way by retail,—now a few pence, and then a few more; he is ever paying, but never comes to the last farthing, and therefore must for ever lie in prison for non-payment. But at Christ's hands God receives the whole debt in one lump, so that Christ could truly say, 'It is finished,' John xix. 30; as much as if he had said, There are but a few moments, and the work of redemption will be finished. I have the sum now in my hand to pay God his whole debt, and as soon as I have bowed my head, and the breath is once out of my body, all will be finished. Yea, he hath his discharge for the receipt of the whole sum due to God's justice from the mouth of God himself, in which we find him triumphing,—'He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?' Yea, still more, Christ hath not only discharged the old debt, but by the same blood hath made a new purchase of God for his saints: so that God, who was even now the creditor, is become the debtor to his creature, and that for no less than eternal life, which Christ hath paid for, and given every believer authority humbly to claim of God in his name. See them both in one place, Heb. x. 12-14: 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool: for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.' He hath not only crossed the debt-book for believers, but perfected them for ever; that is, made a certain provision for their perfection in glory, as for their salvation from hell's punishment: from which he exhorts them, ver. 22, to draw near in full assurance of faith. Let us not fear but we shall receive at God's hands what Christ hath paid for. Thirdly, When God damns the sinner, his justice indeed appears. Those condemned miscreants have not one righteous syllable to charge their Judge withal; but mercy is not seen to sit so glorious on the throne in this sentence pronounced on the sinner. But when Christ suffered, justice and mercy met; indeed, justice appears never more glorious in God or man than when it is in conjunction with mercy. Now, in the Lord Christ's death they shone both in all their glory, and did mutually set off each other. Here the white and the red, the roses and the lilies, were so admirably tempered, that it is hard to say which presented the face of justice most beautiful to our eye,—God's wrath upon Christ for us, or his mercy to us for his sake. Fourthly, When God damns the sinner, justice is glorified only passively. God forceth his glory from devils and damned souls; but they do not willingly pay the debt. They acknowledge God just, because they can do no other, but at the same time hate him, while they seem to vindicate him. Now in the satisfaction that Christ gives, justice is glorified actively, and that both from Christ, who was not dragged to the cross, as the damned are to their prison and torment, 'But gave himself for us, an offering,

Digitized by Google

and a sacrifice to God,' Ephes. v. 2; suffering as willingly for us, as ever we sinned against him; and also from believing souls who now sing praises to the mercy and justice of God who redeemed them; and will for ever in heaven. Now by how much the voluntary sufferings of Christ are better than the forced torments of the damned, and the cheerful praises of saints in heaven more melodious in God's ear than the extorted acknowledgments of damned souls in hell; by so much the justice of God is more glorified by Christ's sufferings, than theirs. O what incomparable boldness may this send the soul withal to the throne of grace! who when he is begging pardon for Christ's sake, may, without any hazard to his eternal salvation, say, Lord, if my damnation will glorify thy justice more, or so much as the death of Christ for me hath done, and the everlasting praises which my thankful heart shall resound in heaven to the glory of all thy attributes for my salvation will do, let me have that rather than this.

Thirdly, Faith doth not only see justice preserved, yea, advanced in this act of pardoning mercy; but it will tell the soul, that God cannot be just, if he doth not pardon the sins of a repenting, believing soul, how great soever they have been. One great part of justice consists in a faithful and punctual performance of promises: he is a just man that keeps his word. And can God be a just God, if he doth not? The word is gone out of his mouth, that he will forgive such. Yea, he is willing to be accounted just or unjust by us, as he makes performance thereof. See where he pledges his attribute upon this very account: 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;' he doth not say 'merciful,' but 'just,' as the attribute which we fear most should vote against us; this he would have us know, is bound for the performance of the promise. It was mercy in God to make the promise; but justice to perform what mercy hath promised: Micah vii. 20, 'Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and mercy to Abraham.' God was not bound to make a promise to Abraham and his seed; but having once passed his word to him, it was truth to Jacob, who was heir to that bond which God had left in his father's hand.

CHAPTER XX.

FAITH'S SECOND ANSWER TO SATAN'S ARGUMENT TAKEN FROM THE GREATNESS OF SIN, TO DRIVE THE SOUL TO DESPAIR: WHERE FAITH OPPOSETH THE GREATNESS OF THE PROMISES, AGAINST THE GREATNESS OF THE SOUL'S SIN.

SECONDLY, Faith quenches this temptation to despair, drawn from the greatness of sin by opposing the greatness of the promises. Faith can only see God in his greatness; and therefore none but faith can see the promises in their greatness, because the value of the promises is according to the worth of him that makes them; hence it comes to pass, that promises have so little efficacy on an unbelieving heart, either to keep from sin, or to comfort under terror for sin. Promises are like the clothes we wear, which if there be heat in the body to warm them, then they will warm us; but if they receive no heat from the body, they give none to it; where there is faith, there the promise will afford comfort and peace; it will be as a strong cordial glowing with inward joy in the creature's bosom, but on a dead, unbelieving heart, it lies cold and ineffectual; it hath no more effect on such a soul than a cordial that is poured down a dead man's throat hath on him. The promises have not comfort actually and formally as fire hath heat: then it were only going to them and we should be warm, taking them up in our thoughts, and we should be comforted; but virtually, as fire is in the flint, which requires some labour and art to strike it out. Now none but faith can learn us the skill of drawing out the sweetness and virtue of the promise, which it doth three ways.

SECTION I.—Faith leads the soul to the spring-head of the promise, where it may stand with best advantage, to take a view of their greatness and preciousness. Indeed we understand little of things, till we trace them to their originals, and can see them lying in their causes. Then a soul will know his sins to be great, when he sees them in their spring and source, flowing from an envenomed nature that teems with enmity against God. Then the sinner will

Digitized by Google

tremble at the threatenings, which roll like thunder over his head, ready to fall every moment in some judgment or other upon him; when he sees from whence they are sent, the perfect hatred that God bears to sin, and infinite wrath with which he is inflamed against the sinner for it. In a word, then the poor trembling soul will not count the consolation of the promises small, when it sees from what fountain it flows, the bosom of God's free mercy. This, indeed, is the original source of all promises. The covenant itself, which comprehends them all, is called 'mercy,' because the product of mercy, Luke i. 72: 'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant.' Now, saith faith, if the promises flow from this sea of God's free mercy, then they must needs be infinite, boundless, and bottomless, as that is; so that to reject the promise, or question the sufficiency of the provision made in it, because thy sins are great or many, casts a dishonourable reflection on that mercy, in whose womb the promise was conceived; and God will certainly bring his action of defamation against thee, for aspersing this his darling attribute, which he can least endure to see slandered and traduced. God makes account you have done your worst against him, when once you report him to be unmerciful, or scant in his mercy. How great a sin this is, may be conceived by the thoughts God hath of this disposition and frame of spirit in his creature. An unmerciful heart is such an abomination before the Lord, that it hath few like it. This lies at the bottom of the heathen's charge, as the sediment and grossest part of all their horrid sins, Rom. i. 31, they were implacable, unmerciful. Now to attribute that to God, which he so abhors in his creature, must needs make a heart which is tender of the good name of God, to tremble and exceedingly fear. It was a dreadful punishment God brought upon Jehoram, king of Judah, 2 Chron. xxi. 18, whom he smote in his bowels with an incurable disease, that after two years' torment his bowels fell out. And why did this heavy plague befall him? Surely to let him know his want of bowels of mercy to his brethren and princes, whom he most cruelly butchered. He had not bowels in his heart, and he, therefore, shall have none in his body.' Now darest thou, saith faith, impute want of bowels to God, that he will not shew mercy to thee, who penitently seekest it in Christ's name, when thou seest what testimony he gives of his incensed wrath against those men who have hardened their bowels against their brethren, yea, their enemies? O have a care of this. To shut thy own bowels of compassion against thy brother in need, is a grievous sin, and brings it into question whether the love of God dwells in thee, 1 John iii. 17; but to asperse the merciful heart of God, as if his bowels of compassion were shut against a poor soul in need that desires to repent and return, is transcendently the greater abomination, and puts it out of all question (where it is persisted in) that the love of God dwells not in him. It is impossible that love to God should draw such a misshapen portrait of God as this is.

SECTION II.—Faith attends to the end of the promises, which gives a farther prospect of their greatness. Now the word, which is the light faith goes by, discovers a double end of promises, especially of the promise of pardoning mercy. First, The exalting and magnifying the riches of free grace, which God would have appear in all its glory, so far as it is possible to be exposed to the creature's view; for the full sight of God's glory is an object adequate to his own eye, and none else. See this counsel and mysterious design sweetly opened, Ephes. i. 6, 9, 11, 12. The sum of all which will amount to this, that God in himself hath taken up a purpose of pardoning and saving a company of poor lost sinners for Christ's sake: and this he hath promulgated in the promises of the gospel; and the end of all is, that he might gather these altogether at last in heaven; some of whom are already there, others of them at present on earth, and some yet unborn, and when they shall all meet together in one glorious choir, they may, by their triumphant songs and hallelujahs, fill the heavens with praise and acclamations of thankfulness to the glory of that mercy which hath thus pardoned and saved them. Now, faith observing the praise of God's mercy to be the end aimed at by him in the promise, comes with good news to the trembling soul, and tells it, that if God will be true to his own thoughts, and keep his eye on that mark where first he hath set it, it is impossible that he should reject any poor penitent sinner merely for the greatness of the sins he hath committed. It is the exaltation of his mercy, saith faith that God hath

Digitized by Google

in his eye, when he promiseth pardon to poor sinners. Now, which exalts this most, to pardon little or great sinners? Whose voice will be highest in the song of praise, thinkest thou? Surely his to whom most is forgiven; and, therefore, God cannot but be most ready to pardon the greatest sinners, when truly penitent. A physician that means to be famous, will not send away those that most need his skill and art, and only practise upon such diseases as are slight and ordinary. When one given over by himself and others, as a dead man, is by the skill and care of a physician, rescued out of the jaws of death, and raised to health, the physician gains great fame thereby; this commends and gains him more reputation than a whole year's practice in ordinary cures. The great revenue of praise is paid into God's exchequer from those who have had great sins pardoned. He that hath five hundred pence forgiven will love more than he that hath but fifty, by Christ's own judgment, Luke vii. 43; and where there is most love, there is likely to be most praise, love and praise being symbolical, the one soon resolving into the other. The voice of a Manasses, a Magdalen, and a Paul, will be heard, as I may say, above all the rest in heaven's concert. The truth is, greatness of sin is so far from putting a bar to the pardoning of a penitent sinner in God's thoughts, that he will pardon none (how little sinners soever they have been) except they see and acknowledge their sins to be great before they come to him on such an errand: and therefore he useth the law to make way, by its convictions and terrors on the conscience, for his pardoning mercy, to ascend the throne in the penitent sinner's heart with the more magnificence and honour, Rom. v. 20: 'The law entered' (that is, it was promulgated at first by Moses, and is still preached,) 'that the offence might abound,' that is, in the conscience, by a deeper sense and remorse: and why so, but that, where sin abounded, grace might much more abound.' We must needs shape our thoughts of the mercy that pardons our sins, as to make them suitable to the thoughts we frame to ourselves of the sins we have committed. If we conceive these little, how can we think the other great? And if we tremble at the greatness of our sins, we must needs triumph and exult at the transcendency of the mercy which so far exceeds their greatness. He that wonders at the height of some mountain, would much more wonder at the depth of those waters which should quite swallow and cover it, so that it could not be seen. The second end of the promise is, the believer's comfort. The word, especially this part of it, was on purpose written, that 'through patience and comfort of the Scriptures,' they 'might have hope,' Rom. xv. 4. God was willing to give poor sinners all the security and satisfaction concerning the reality of his intentions, and immutability of his counsel, which his mercy had resolved upon from eternity, for the saving of all those who would embrace Christ; which, that he might do, he makes publication thereof in the Scripture, where he opens his very heart, and exposeth the purposes of his love, which he had from everlasting, for the salvation of poor sinners, to their own view, in the many precious promises that run like veins throughout the whole body of the Scriptures, and these with all the seals and ratifications which either his wisdom could find, or man's jealous, unbelieving heart desire; and all to silence the querulous spirit of poor, tempted souls, and make their life more comfortable; who, pursued by the hue-and-cry of their high-climbing sins, take sanctuary for their lives in Christ Jesus. As we have it, *in totidem verbis*, Heb. vi. 18: 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that is set before us.' And because this, the greatness and multitude of the creature's sins, is both the heaviest millstone which the devil can find to tie about the poor sinner's neck, in order to the drowning him in despair; and that knife also which is the oftenest taken up by the tempted sinner's own hands for the murdering his faith, therefore the more frequent and abundant provision is made by God against this: Exod. xxxiv. 5; Jer. iii., the whole chapter; Isa. i. 18; lv. 7—9, and 21; Heb. vii. 25; 1 John i. 9. These, and such like places, are the strongholds which faith retreats into when this battery is raised against the soul. Canst thou, for shame, be gravelled, saith faith, O my soul, with an argument drawn merely from the greatness of thy sins, which is answered in almost every page in the Bible, and to confute which so considerable a part of Scripture was written Thus faith hisseth Satan away with this argument,

Digitized by Google

which he counts so formidable, as they would do a wrangling sophist out of the schools, when he boldly and ridiculously denies some known principle, acknowledged by all for a truth. But I would not be here mistaken: God forbid, that while I am curing despair, I should cause presumption. These two distempers of the soul are equally dangerous, and so contrary, that, like the cold stomach and the hot liver in the same person, while the physician thinks to help nature in the one to a heat for digesting food, he sometimes unhappily kindles a fire in the other that destroys nature itself. Thus, while we labour to cheer the drooping soul's spirits, and strengthen him to retain and digest the promise for his comfort, we are in danger of nourishing that feverish heat of presumptuous confidence, which is a fire that will soon eat out all care to please, and fear to displease God, faith and fear being like the natural heat and radical moisture in the body, which is never well but when both are preserved. 'The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, and hope in his mercy.' Let me, therefore, caution thee, Christian, as thou meanest to find any relief from the mercy of God in a day of distress, take heed thou dost not think to befriend thyself with hopes of any favour thou mayest find from thy lust. Thou needest not indeed fear to believe the pardon of thy sins, if thou repentest of them, merely because they are great, but tremble to think of sinning boldly, because the mercy of God is great. Though mercy be willing to be a sanctuary to the trembling sinner, to shelter him from the curse of his sin, yet it disdains to spread its wing over a bold sinner, to cover him while he is wallowing in his lust. What! sin because there are promises of pardon, and these promises made by mercy which as far exceeds our sins as God doth the creature? Truly, this is the reverse of the object which God's mercy had in making them, and turns the gospel heels upwards; as if your servant should get to your cellar of strong waters, and with them make himself drunk, which you keep for those who are sick or faint. O take heed of quaffing thus in the bowls of the sanctuary! It is the sad soul, not the sinning, that this wine of consolation belongs to.

SECTION III.—Faith presents the Christian with a cloud of witnesses to whom the promise hath been fulfilled, and these as great sinners as himself. Scripture examples are promises verified, which faith may make use of by way of encouragement, as well as promises. God would never have left the saints' great blots to stand in the Scriptures, to the view of the world in all succeeding generations, had it not been of such use and advantage to tempted souls to choak this temptation, which, of all others, makes the most dangerous breach, so wide, sometimes, that despair itself is ready to enter in at it. Blessed Paul gives this very reason why such acts of pardoning mercy to great sinners are recorded: Ephes. ii. He shews, first, what foul, filthy creatures himself and other believers cotemporary with him were before they were made partakers of gospel grace: verse 3, 'Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of our flesh;' and then he magnifies the rich mercy of God, that rescued and took them out of that desperate state, verses 4, 5: 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickened us together with Christ.' And why must the world know all this? O! God had a design and plot of mercy for more than themselves in this, verse 7: 'That, in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus.' Wherever the gospel comes, this shall be spoken of, what great sins he had forgiven to them, that unbelief might have her mouth stopped to the end of the world, and this arrow, which is so often on Satan's string, might be made harmless. God commanded Joshua to take twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan, and set them up; and observe the reason, verses 6, 7; 'That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, What mean you by these stones? then ye shall answer them, that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, when it passed over Jordon; the waters of Jordan were cut off, and these stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.' Thus God hath, by his pardoning mercy, taken up some great, notorious sinners out of the very depths of sin, who lay at the very bottom, as it were, of hell, swallowed up and ingulphed in all manner of abomination; and these he hath set up in his word, that when any poor, tempted souls to the end of the world, over-

Digitized by Google

whelmed with fears from the greatness of their sins, may see and read what God hath done for these, and be relieved and comforted with these examples, by God intended to be as a memorial of what he had done for others in time past, and a sign what he can still do, yea, will, for the greatest sinners to the world's end, upon their repentance and faith. No sins, though as great and many as the waters of Jordan themselves, shall be able to stand before the mercy of God's gracious covenant, but shall all be cut off, and everlastingly pardoned to them. O! who can read of a Manasseh, a Magdalen, a Saul, yea, an Adam, who undid himself and a whole world with him, in the roll of pardoned sinners, and yet turn away from the promise, out of fear there is not mercy enough in it to serve his turn? These are as land-marks, which shew what large boundaries mercy hath set to itself, and how far it hath gone, even to take into its pardoning arms the greatest sinners, that make not themselves incapable thereof by final impenitency. It were a healthful walk, poor, doubting Christian, for thy soul to go this circuit, and often to see where the utmost stone is laid and boundary set by God's pardoning mercy, farther than which he will not go; that thou mayest not turn, to the prejudice of the mercy of God, by thy own unbelief, nor suffer thyself to be abused by Satan's lies, who will make nothing to remove God's landmark, if he may by it but increase thy trouble of spirit. But if after all this, thy sins seem to exceed the proportion of any one thou canst find pardoned in Scripture, which were strange; yet faith hath one way left beyond all these examples, for thy soul's succour, and that is, to fix thy eye on Christ, who, though he never had sin of his own, yet laid down his life to procure pardon for all the elect, and hath obtained it; they are all, and shall, as they come upon the stage, be pardoned. Now, saith faith, suppose thy sins were greater than any of the saints'; yet are they as great as all the sins of all the elect together? Thou darest not surely say or think so. And cannot Christ procure thy pardon, who art but an individual, when he hath done it for so many millions of his elect? Yea, were thy sins as great as all theirs are, the sum would be the same; and God could forgive it, if it lay in one heap, as well as now it is in several. Christ is 'the Lamb, that taketh away the sin of the world?' John i. 29. See here all the sins of the elect world, and he carries it lightly away into the land of forgetfulness. Now, faith will tell thee, poor soul, that the whole virtue and merit of Christ's blood, by which the world was redeemed, is offered to thee, and shall be communicated to thy soul in particular. Christ doth not retail and parcel out his blood, some to one and some to another, but he gives his whole self to the faith of every believer: all is yours, you are Christ's. O, what mayest thou not, poor soul, take up from the promise, upon the credit of so great a Redeemer!

CHAPTER XXI.

FAITH'S THIRD ANSWER TO SATAN'S ARGUMENT, URGING THE SOUL TO DESPAIR; WHERE FAITH OPPOSETH THE GREATNESS OF THIS ONE SIN OF DESPAIR TO THE GREATNESS OF THE REST.

THIRDLY. Faith to quench this fiery dart, headed with the greatness of sin, and shot by Satan to drive the penitent soul to despair, teacheth him to oppose the greatness of this one sin of despair to the greatness of all his other sins. What, saith faith, would Satan persuade thee, because thou hast been so great and prodigious a sinner, therefore not to believe, or dare to think the promise hath any good news for thee? Retort thou, O my soul, his argument upon himself, and tell him, that the very thing by which he would dissuade thee from believing, doth much more deter thee from despairing; and that is, the greatness of this sin above all others. Grant it to be true what he chargeth thee with, that thou art such a monster in sin as he sets thee forth (though thou hast no reason to think so upon his bare report), dost thou think to mend the matter, or better thy condition by despairing? Is this all the kindness he will shew thee, to make thee, of a great sinner, a desperate one like himself? This, indeed, is the only way he can think of to make thee worse than thou art; and that this is true, faith is able to prove by these four considerations, which will easily evince more malignity to be in this one sin of despair than in any other, yea, than in all others together.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—Despair opposeth God in the greatest of all his commands. The greatest command, beyond all comparison, in the whole Bible, is to believe. When those Jews asked our Lord Jesus, John vi. 28, 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' mark the answer, ver. 29, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.' As if he had said, The most compendious way, that I am able to give you, is to receive me into your hearts by faith; do this and you do all in one. 'This is the work;' that is, *instar omnium*, all you do is undone, and yourselves also, till this be done, for which you shall have as much thanks at God's hands, as if you could keep the whole law; indeed, it is accepted in lieu of it. 'To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,' Rom. iv. 5. Where, by he that worketh not, is not meant a slothful, lazy sinner, who hath no disposition to work; nor a rebellious sinner, whose heart riseth against the work, which the whole law of God would employ him in; but the humbled sinner, who desires and endeavours to work, but is not able to do the task, which the law as a covenant sets him, and therefore is said, in a law sense, not to work, because he doth not work to the law's purpose, so as to answer its demands, which will accept nothing short of perfect obedience; this man's faith on Christ is accepted for righteousness; that is, God reckons him so, and so he shall pass at the great day by the Judge's sentence, as if he had never trod one step out of the path of the law. Now, if faith be the work of God above all other, then unbelief is the work of the devil, and that which he had rather thou shouldst do, than any other sin; and despair is unbelief at the worst. Unbelief among sins is as the plague among diseases, the most dangerous; but when it riseth to despair, then it is as the plague, with the tokens appearing, that bring the certain message of death with them. Unbelief is despair in the bud; despair is unbelief at its full growth.

SECTION II.—Despair hath a way peculiar to itself of dishonouring God above other sins. Every sin wounds the law, and the name of God through the law. But this wound is healed when the penitent sinner by faith comes to Christ, and closeth with him. God makes account that reparations now are fully made, through Christ, whom the believer receives for the wrong done to his law, and his name vindicated from the dishonour cast upon it by the creature's former iniquities; yea, that it appears more glorious, because it is illustrious, by the shining forth of one title of honour (not the least prized by God himself), his forgiving mercy, which could not have been so well known to the creature, if not drawn forth into action upon this occasion. But, what would you say of such a prodigious sinner, who when he hath wounded the law, is not willing to have it healed;—when he hath dishonoured God, and that in a highly provoking manner, is not willing that the dirt he hath cast on God's face should be wiped off? Methinks your colour rises at the reading of this, against such a wretch, and you are asking, as once Ahasuerus did Esther, 'Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?' Esther vii. 5. Would you know? Truly the adversary and enemy is this wicked despair. The despairing soul is the person that will not let Christ make satisfaction for the wrong which by his sins he hath done God. Suppose a man should wound another dangerously, in his passion, and when he hath done, will not let a surgeon come near to cure the wound he hath made: every one would say, his last act of cruelty was worse than his first. O my soul, saith faith, thou didst ill, yea, very ill, in breaking the holy laws of God, and dishonouring the name of the great God of heaven and earth thereby; let thy heart ache for this. But thou dost far worse by thy despairing of mercy. In this act thou rejectest Christ, and keepest him from satisfying the justice of the law that is injured by thee, and from redeeming the honour of his name from the reproach thy sins have scandalized it with. What language speaks thy despair, but this? Let God come by his right and honour as he can, thou wilt never be an instrument active in helping him to do it, by believing on Christ, in whom he may fully have them with advantage. O what shame would despair put the mercy of God to in the sight of Satan, his worst enemy? He is overjoyed at this, to see all the glorious attributes of God served alike, and divested of their honour. This is meat and drink to him. That cursed spirit desires no better music than to hear the soul ring the promises, like bells backward,—make no other use of

Digitized by Google

them than to confirm it in its own desperate thoughts of its damnation, and to tell it that hell-fire is kindled in its conscience, which no mercy in God will or can quench to eternity. As the bloody Jews and Roman soldiers exercised their cruelty on every part almost of Christ's body, crowning his head with thorns, goring his side with a spear, and fastening his hands and feet with nails; so the despairing sinner deals with the whole name of God. He doth, as it were, put a mock crown on the head of his wisdom, setting it all to nought, and charging it foolishly, as if the method of salvation was not laid with prudence by the all-wise God. He nails the hands of his almighty power, while he thinks his sins are of that nature as puts him out of the reach and beyond the power of God to save him. He pierceth the tender bowels of God's mercy when he cannot see enough in him to persuade him to hope for any favour or forgiveness at his hands. In a word, the despairing soul transfixeth his very heart and will, while he unworthily frames notions of God as if he were unwilling to the work of mercy, and not so inclined to exercise acts of pardon and forgiveness on poor sinners as the word declares him to be. Despair basely misreports him to the soul as if he were a lame God, and had no feet (affections I mean) to carry him to such a work as forgiving sin. Now, what does the sum of all this amount to; if you can without horror and amazement stand to cast it up, and consider the weight of those circumstances which aggravate the flagitiousness of this unparalleled fact? Surely it riseth to no less than the highest attempt that the creature can make for the murdering of God himself; for the infinitude of God's wisdom, power, mercy, and all his attributes, are more intrinsical to the essence and being of God than the heart's blood is to the life of a mortal man. Shall he that lets out the heart's blood of a man, yea, but attempts to do it, be a murderer (especially if he be a prince or king which the design is against), and deservedly suffer as such; and shall not he much more be counted and punished as the worst of all murderers that attempts to take away the life of God (though his arm and dagger be too short for the purpose) by taking from him in his thoughts the infinitude of those attributes which are, as I may say, the very life of God? Surely God will neither part with the glory, nor suffer the dishonour of his name, at the hands of his sorry creature, but will engage all his attributes for the avenging himself on the wretch that attempts it. O, tremble, therefore, at despair. Nothing makes thy face gather blackness, and thy soul hasten faster to the complexion of damned souls than this; now thou sinnest after the similitude of those that are in hell.

SECTION III.—Despair strengthens and enrageth all other sins in the soul. There are none that fight so fiercely as those who look for no quarter. They think themselves dead men, therefore they will sell their lives as dear as they can. Samson despaired of ever getting out of the Philistines' hands, his eyes being lost, and he unfit to make an escape: what doth he meditate, now that his case is desperate, but his enemies' ruin? He cares not though he pulls the house on his own head, so it may but fall on the Philistines also. When Absalom, by the wicked counsel of Ahithophel, had as he thought made himself so hateful to David as to be past all hope of being treated with, he then breaks out with a high rage, and seeks the ruin of his royal father with fire and sword. So cruel a thing is despair; it teaches to shew no respect where it looks for none. But most clearly it appears in the devil himself, who, knowing himself to be excluded from pardon, sins with a rage as high as heaven; and the same sin hath the same effects in men that it hath in the devil, according to the degrees of it which are found in them. 'They said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices,' Jer. xviii. 12. Did you never see a sturdy beggar, after some time knocking at a door, and concluding by the present silence or denial that he shall have nothing given him, fall into a cursing and railing of them that dwell there? Even such foul language doth despair teach the sinner to make use of against the God of heaven. If despair enters, it is impossible to keep blasphemy out: pray therefore, and do thy utmost to repel this dart, lest it soon set thy soul on a flame with this hell-fire of blasphemy. Hear, O souls smitten for sin, who spend your lives in sighs, sobs, and tears, for your horrid enemies: would you again be seen fighting against God as fierce as ever? If you would not, take heed of despair. If thou once thinkest that

Digitized by Google

God's heart is hardened against thee, thy heart will not be long hardening against him. And this, by the way, may administer comfort to the thoughts of some gracious but troubled souls who cannot find that they have any faith, yea, who are often reckoning themselves among despairers. Let me ask thee who art in this sad condition this one thing, Canst thou find any love breathing in thy heart toward God, though thou canst find no breath of love coming at present from him to thee, and art thou tender and fearful of sinning against him, even while thou seemest to thy own thoughts to hope for no mercy from him? If so, be of good comfort; thy faith may be weak, but thou art far from being under the power of despair. Desperate souls do not reserve any love for God, or care to please him. There is some faith surely in thy soul, which is the cause of these motions, though, like the spring in a watch, it be itself unseen, when the other graces moved by it are visible.

SECTION IV.—The greatness of this sin of despair appears in this, that the least sin envenomed by it is unpardonable; and without this, the greatest is pardonable. That must needs of all sins be most abominable which makes the creature incapable of mercy. Judas was not damned merely for his treason and murder; for others, who had their hands deep in the same horrid fact, obtained a pardon by faith in that blood which through cruelty they shed; but for these, heightened into the greatest malignity possible by the despair and final impenitency with which his wretched heart was filled, which he died so miserably of, and now is infinitely more miserably damned for.

EPHESIANS VI. 17.

And take the helmet of salvation.

THESE words present us with another piece in the Christian's panoply—a helmet to cover his head in the day of battle. It makes the fifth in the apostle's order; and what is observable, this and most of the pieces in this magazine are defensive arms, and all to defend the Christian from sin, none to secure him from suffering. First, They are mostly defensive arms. Indeed, there is but one, of all the pieces in the whole panoply, for offence, that is the sword. It may be to give us this hint, that this spiritual war of the Christian lies chiefly on the defence, and therefore requires arms most of this kind to wage it. God hath deposited a rich treasure of grace in every saint's heart: the devil's greatest spite is against this; to plunder him of which, and with it of his happiness, he commenceth a bloody war against him: so that the Christian overcomes his enemy, when himself is not overcome by him, his work being rather to keep what is his own than to get what is his enemy's. And truly, were it well heeded that the saint's war lies chiefly on the defence, it would be of singular use to direct him how to manage his combats both with Satan and his instruments. First, with Satan. Look, Christian, that thou standest always in a defensive posture, with thy armour on, as a soldier, upon thy works, ready to defend the castle of thy soul, which God hath set thee to keep, and valiantly to repel Satan's assaults, whenever he makes his approach; but be not persuaded out of the line of thy place and calling, no, not under the specious pretence of zeal and hope to get the greater victory by falling into the enemy's quarters. Let Satan be the assailant, and come if he will to tempt thee; but go not thou in a bravado to tempt him to do it. It is just he should be foiled that seeks his own danger. This got Peter his fall in the high-priest's hall, who was left therefore cowardly to deny his Master, that he might learn humbly to deny himself ever after. Secondly, with Satan's instruments. May be they revile and reproach thee. Remember now thy part lies on the defence. Give not railing for railing, reproach for reproach. The gospel allows thee no liberty to use their weapons, and return them *quid pro quo:* 1 Pet. iii. 8, 9, "Be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but, contrariwise, blessing.' Thou hast here a bridal and breastplate to defend thee from their bullets; the comfort of thy own sincerity and holy walking, with which thou mayest wipe of the dirt thrown upon thy face, but no weapon for self-revenge. A shield is put into thy hand, which thou mayest lift up to quench their fiery darts, but no darts

Digitized by Google

of bitter words to retort upon them. Thou art shod with peace that thou mayest walk safely upon the injuries they do thee, without any prick or pain to thy spirit, but not with pride to trample upon the persons that wrong thee.

Secondly, All the pieces are to defend the Christian from sin;—none to secure him from suffering. They are to defend him in suffering, not privilege him from it. He must prepare the more for suffering, because he is so well furnished with armour to bear it. Armour is not given for men to wear by the fire-side, but in the field. How shall the maker be praised, if the metal of his arms be not known; and where shall it be put to the proof, but amidst swords and bullets? He that desires to live all his days in a state of ease and security will never make a good Christian. Resolve for hardship, or lay down thy arms. Here is the true reason why so few come at the beat of Christ's drum to his standard, and so many of those few that have enlisted themselves by an external profession under him, within a while drop away, and leave his colours; it is suffering work they are sick of. Most men are more tender of their skin than of their conscience, and had rather the gospel had provided armour to defend their bodies from death and danger, than their souls from sin and Satan.

But I come to the words, 'And take the helmet of salvation:' in which we may observe,—First, The copulative, which clasps this to the former piece,—'and,' Secondly, the piece of armour itself, 'The helmet of salvation.'

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN THE CONCATENATION OF GRACES, IN THEIR BIRTH, GROWTH, AND DECAY, IS SET FORTH,

First. The copulative 'and'—'And take;'—that is, with the shield of faith, and all the other pieces of armour here set down, take this also into the field with you. See here how every grace is lovingly coupled to its fellow; and all at last, though many pieces, make but one suit. The note which this points at is, the concatenation of graces. Note, The sanctifying, saving graces of God's Spirit are linked inseparably together: there is a connexion of them one to the other, and that in their birth, growth, and decay.

Section I.—In their birth. Where one sanctifying grace is, the rest are all to be found. It is not so in common gifts and graces; these are parcelled out, like the gifts Abraham bestowed on the children he had by his concubines, Gen. xxv. 6. One hath this gift, another hath that; none hath all. He that hath a gift of knowledge may want a gift of utterance, and so of the rest. But sanctifying graces are like the inheritance he gave to Isaac; every true believer hath them all given him. He that is 'in Christ is a new creature: behold all things are become new,' 2 Cor. v. 17. Now the new creature contains all; as natural corruption is an universal principle of all sin that sours the whole lump of man's nature, so is sanctifying grace an universal principle that sweetly seasons, and renews the whole man at once, though not wholly. Grace comes, saith one, into the soul, as the soul into the body, at once. Indeed, it grows by steps, but is born at once; the new creature hath all its parts formed together, though not its degrees; some one grace may be perceived to stir, and so come under the Christian's notice before another. He may feel his fear of God putting forth itself in a holy trembling and awe upon his spirit at the thoughts of God, before he sees his faith in the fiduciary recumbency of his soul upon God: yet the one grace is not produced before the other. One part of the world hath been discovered to us long before the other; yet all the world was made together. Now this connexion of graces in their birth is of double use. First, To relieve the sincere Christian when in doubt of his gracious state, because he cannot at present discern in his soul some particular grace which he inquires for. Possibly it is faith thou hast been looking for, and it is not any where to be heard of. Well, Christian, do not presently unsaint thyself, till thou hast made farther trial of thyself. Send out therefore thy spies to search for some other grace, as thy love to Christ; may be thou wilt hear some tidings of this grace, though the other is not in view. Hath not thy love to God and Christ been seen by thee in such a temptation, chasing it away with Joseph's answer to his wanton mistress, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Yea, mayest thou not see it all the day long, either in thy sincere

Digitized by Google

care to please him, or hearty sorrow when thou hast done anything that grieves him? in which two veins runs the life-blood of a soul's love to Christ. Now know, to thy comfort, that thy love can tell thee news of thy faith. As Christ said in another case, 'He that hath seen me, hath seen my Father,' John xiv. 9, so say I to thee, thou that hast seen thy love to Christ, hast seen thy faith in the face of thy love. But may be thy love to Christ is also lodged in a cloud. Well, then, see whether thou canst espy no evangelical repentance, loathing thee with the sight of thy sins, as also in firing thee with revenge against them, as those enemies which drew thee into rebellion against God; yea, as the bloody weapons with which thou hast so often wounded the name, and murdered the Son of God. Behold, the grace thou lookest for stands before thee. What is love to God, if zeal against sin, as God's enemy, be not? Did not Abishai love David, when his heart so boiled over with rage against Shimei for cursing David, that he could not help breaking out in a passion, saying, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head;' 2 Sam. xvi. 9. And by thy own acknowledgment, it troubles thee as much to hear thy lusts bark against God; and thy will is as good to be the death of them, if God would but grant his consent, as ever Abishai's was to strike that traitor's head off. And yet art thou in doubt whether thou lovest God or no? Truly, then, thou canst not see love for zeal. Thus, as by taking hold of one link, you may draw up the rest of the chain that lies under water; so by discovering one grace, you may bring all to sight. Joseph and Mary were indeed deceived, when they supposed their son to be in the company of their kindred, Luke ii. 44; but thou canst not do so here; for this holy kindred of graces go together: they are knit as members of the body, one to another; though you see only the face of a man, yet you doubt not but the whole man is there. Secondly, As it may relieve the sincere Christian, so it will help to expose and put the hypocrite to shame, who makes great pretences to some one grace, when he hates another at the same time: a certain sign of a false heart. He never had any grace that loves not all graces. Moses would not go out of Egypt with half his company, Exod. x. 26: either all must go, or none: neither will the Spirit of God come into a soul with half his sanctifying graces, but all his train. If, therefore, thy heart be set against any one grace, it proves thou art a stranger to the rest; and though thou mayest seem a great admirer of one grace, yet the opposition which thou shewest to others, washeth off the paint of this fair cover. He that loves or hates one saint, as such, doth the same by every saint; so he that cordially closeth with one grace, will find every grace endeared to him, for they are as like one to another, as one sunbeam is to another.

SECTION II.—Sanctifying graces are connected in their growth and decay: increase one grace, and you strengthen all; impare one, and you will be a loser in all; and the reason is, because they are reciprocally helpful to each other. So that when one grace is wounded, the assistance which it would, if in temper, contribute to the Christian's common stock, is either entirely lost, or much lessened. When love cools, obedience slackens, and goes on heavily, because it wants the oil on its wheel which love used to drop; when obedience falters faith weakens: how can there be great faith, where there is little faithfulness? when faith is weak, hope presently wavers; for it is the credit of faith's report, that hope goes on to expect good from God: and hope wavering patience becomes a bankrupt, and can keep his shop open no longer, because it trades with the stock which hope lends it. In the body you observe, there are many members, yet all make but one body; and every member so useful, that the others are beholden to it: so in the Christian there are many graces, but one new creature: and the eye of knowledge cannot say to the hand of faith, I have no need of thee; neither can the hand of faith say so to the foot of obedience; but all are preserved by the mutual care they have of one another; for as ruin to the whole city may enter at a breach in one part of its wall, and the soul run out through a wound in a particular member of the body; so the ruin of all graces may, yea, must, needs follow on the ruin of any one. There is, indeed, a stronger bond of union between graces of our souls, than there is between the members of our body. It is possible, yea, ordinary, for some member to be cut off from the body, without the death of the whole, because all the members of the body are not vital parts. But every grace is a vital part

Digitized by Google

in the new creature, and so essential to its very being, that its absence cannot be supplied *per vicariam*. In the body, one eye can make a shift to do the office of its fellow which is put out, and one hand do the other's work that is cut off, though may be not so exactly; but faith cannot do the office of love, nor love the work of obedience. The lack of one wheel spoils the motion of the whole clock; and if one grace be wanting, the end would not be attained for which this rare piece of workmanship is set up in the saint's heart.

First, Let it learn thee, Christian, this wisdom, whenever thou findest any grace weakened, either through thy negligence in not attending to it, or Satan's temptations wounding it, speedily to endeavour the recovery of it; because thou dost not only lose the comfort which the exercise of this one grace might bring, but thou weakenest all the others. Is he a bad husband who hazards the fall of his house, by suffering a hole or two in the roof? What then art thou, who puttest thy whole gracious state in danger, by neglecting a timely repair to the breach made in one of thy graces? And so, when thou art tempted to any sin, look not on it as a single sin, but as having all other sins in its belly. Consider what thou doest, before thou gratifiest Satan in any one motion; for by one sin thou strengthenest the whole body of sin: give to one sin, and that will send more beggars to your door, and they will come with a stronger plea than the former; why mayest thou not do this for them as well as for the other? Thy best way is to keep the door shut to all, lest, while thou intendest to entertain only one, all crowd in. But if it were possible that thou couldst break this connexion of sin, so as to take off one link that pleaseth thee best, and not draw the whole chain after thee by committing this, yet know there is a connexion of guilt also, James ii. 10: 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' As he that administereth to the estate of one deceased, though it be never so little that he takes into his hands, becomes liable to pay all his debts, and brings all his creditors upon him; so by tampering but with one sin, and that a little one, thou bringest the whole law upon thy back, which will arrest thee upon God's suit, as a transgressor of all its commands. Thus the law is copulative; an affront done to one redounds to the dishonour of all, and so is resented by God, the lawgiver, whose authority is equally in all.

Secondly, This may comfort those who trouble themselves with the thoughts of future changes which may befall them. And what shall they do then? say they. Now, blessed be God, they make a shift to serve God in their place; but what if straits come—poverty, sickness, or other crosses? How shall they then behave? Where is their faith, patience, and other suffering graces, that should enable them to walk on these waves without sinking? They fear, alas! that little of these suffering graces is in their hands. Well, Christian, for thy encouragement know, if the graces of thy present condition (those, I mean, which God calls thee to exercise now in thy prosperous state,) be lively, thou mayest comfortably hope the other suffering graces, which now stand unseen behind the curtain, will do the same, when God changeth the scene of thy affairs, and calls them upon the stage to act their part. The more humble thou art now with thy abundance, the more patient thou wilt certainly shew thyself in thy penury. So much as thy heart is now above the world's enjoyments, even so much thou wilt be above the troubles and sorrows of it. Trees grow proportionably under ground to what they do above; and the Christian will find something like this in his graces.

CHAPTER II

OF THE NATURE OF HOPE, WHY STYLED HOPE OF SALVATION, AND WHY COMPARED TO A HELMET.

We have done with the connective particle, whereby this piece is coupled to the former, and now come to address our discourse to the piece of armour itself, —'Take the helmet of salvation.' Though we have not here, as in all the other, the grace expressed, yet we need not be at a loss for it, if we consult another place, where our apostle, lends us a key to decipher his meaning in this; 1 Thes. i. 8: 'And for a helmet the hope of salvation;' so that, without any scruple, we shall determine upon the grace of hope,' as intended by the Holy

Digitized by Google

Ghost in this place. Now in order to a treatise of this grace, it is requisite that something be said by explication, which may serve as a light set up in the entry to lead us the better into the several rooms of the point which is to be the subject of our discourse.

Section I.—We shall, first, shew the nature of this grace of hope, which will be best done by laying down a plain description of it, and briefly explicating the parts. Hope is a supernatural grace of God, whereby the believer, through Christ, expects and waits for all those good things of the promise, which at present he hath not fully received. First, Here is the author or efficient cause of it, 'God,' who is called 'the God of all grace,' 1 Pet. v. 10; that is, the giver and worker of all grace, both to the first seed, and the further growth of it. It is impossible for the creature to make the least pile of grass, or being made, to make it grow; and as impossible to produce the least seed of grace in the heart, or add one cubit to the stature of it. No, as God is the father of the rain, by which the herbs in the field spring and grow, so also of those spiritual dews and influences that must make every grace thrive and flourish. The apostle teacheth us this, when he prays that God would 'perfect, establish, strengthen, settle' them; and as of all grace in general, so of this in particular, Rom. xv. 13, where he is styled the 'God of hope,' and by whom we abound in hope also. This hope is supernatural, and thereby distinguished from the heathen's hope, which, with the rest of their moral virtues, so far as any excellency were found in them, came from God (to whom every man that cometh into the world is beholden for all the light he hath, John i. 9), and is but the remains of man's first noble principles; as sometimes we shall see a broken turret or two stand in the midst of the ruins of some stately palace demolished, which serves for little more than to help the spectator to give a guess what goodly buildings once stood there.

Secondly, Hope's subject,—the believer. True hope is a jewel that no one wears but Christ's bride; a grace with which no one is graced but the believer's soul. Christless and hopeless are joined together, Ephes. ii. 12; and here it is not amiss to observe the order in which hope stands to faith. In regard of time they are not one before another, but in order of nature and operation faith hath the precedency of hope. Faith closeth with the promise as a true and faithful word, then hope lifts up the soul to wait for the performance of it. Who goes out to meet him whom he believes will not come? The promise is as it were God's love-letter to his church and spouse, in which he opens his very heart, and tells all he means to do for her. Faith reads and embraceth it with joy, whereupon the believing soul, by hope, looks out at this window with a longing expectation to see her husband's chariot come in the accomplishment thereof: so Paul gives a reason of his own hope from his faith, Acts xxiv. 14, 15, and prays for the Romans' faith, in order to their hope, Rom. xv. 13.

Thirdly, Hope's object. 1. In general, something that is good. If a thing be evil, we fear and fly from it; if good, we hope and wait for it. And here is one note of difference between it and faith;—faith believes evil as well as good; hope is conversant only about good. 2. It is the good of the promise; and in this faith and hope agree: both their lines are drawn from the same centre of the promise. Hope without a promise, is like an anchor without ground to hold by; it bears the promise on its name. 'I stand and am judged,' saith Paul, 'for the hope of the promise,' Acts xxvi. 6. So David shews where he moors his ship and casts his anchor; 'I hope in thy word,' Psa. cxix. 81. True hope will trade only for true good; and we can call nothing so that the good God hath not promised; for the promise runs thus, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Psa. lxxxiv. 11. 3. All the good things of the promise. As God hath encircled all good in the promise, so he hath promised nothing but good; and therefore hope's object is all that the promise holds forth: only as the matter of the promise hath more degrees of goodness, so hope longs more earnestly for it. God is the chief good, and the fruition of him is promised as the utmost happiness of the creature: therefore true hope takes her chief aim at God, and makes all other promises in a subserviency to lift the soul nearer unto him. He is called, 'the hope of Israel,' Jer. xvii. 13. There is nothing beyond God, the enjoying of whom the believer projects; and nothing short of God that he can be content with.

Digitized by Google

Now, because God is only enjoyed fully and securely in heaven's blissful state, therefore it is called 'the hope of glory,' Col. i. 27; 'of eternal life,' Tit. iii. 7; 'of salvation,' 1 Thess. v. 8. Lastly, The object of hope is the good of the promise, not in hand, but yet to be performed. 'Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?' Rom. viii. 24. Futurity is intrinsical to hope's object, and distinguisheth it from faith, which gives a present being to the promise, and is 'the substance of things hoped for,' Heb. xi. 1. The good of the promise hath a kind of subsistence by faith in the soul; it brings the Christian and heaven together, as if he were there already; hence they are said by faith to embrace the promise, Heb. xi. 13, as two friends when they meet; faith speaks in the present tense, 'We are conquerors, yea, we are more than conquerors.' Partial performance of the promise intends hope; but complete performance ends hope, and swallows it up in love and joy. Indeed, either the full performance of the promise, or execution of the threatening, shuts out all hope. In heaven the promise is paid, and hope dismissed, because we have what was looked for; and in hell the threatening is fully inflicted, and therefore there is no hope to be found among the damned, because there is no possibility of release.

Fourthly. Hope's aid, by whose help, and for whose sake, it expects to obtain the promise, and that is, Jesus Christ. It waits for all in and through him; he is therefore called 'our hope,' 1 Tim. i. 1, because through him we hope for what is promised; by whose death we have leave and liberty to expect good from God, and by whose Spirit we have ability to hope; so that both the authority and strength to hope come from Christ; the former by the effusion of his blood for us, the latter by the infusion of his Spirit into us.

Section II.—Why is the Christian's hope styled a 'hope of salvation?' A double reason is obvious. First, Because salvation comprehends and takes within its circle the whole object of the Christian's hope. Salvation imports a complete state of bliss, wherein meet eminently the mercies and enjoyments of all the promises, scattered, some in one, and some in another; as at the creation, the light which was first diffused through the firmament, was gathered afterward into the sun. Cast up the particular sums of all the good things promised in the covenant, and the total they amount unto is—'salvation.' The *ultima unitas* gives the denomination to the number, because it comprehends all; so salvation, the ultimate object of the Christian's expectation, and that which comprehends the rest, denominates his hope. Secondly, It is called a 'hope of salvation,' to distinguish it from the worlding's hope, whose portion (Psalm xvii. 14,) is in this life, and so is his hope also. It is confessed, that many of these pretend to a hope of salvation; but the truth is, they neither have a right to it, nor are they very eager of it. They think themselves so well seated in this world, that if they might have their wish, it should be, that God would not remove them hence. Even when they say, they hope to be saved, their consciences tell them they had rather stay here than part with this world, in hope to mend themselves in the other. They blow up themselves into a hope and desire of salvation, more out of a dread of hell than a liking of heaven. There are none, I think, so mad among them, but had rather be saved than damned;—live in heaven, then lie in hell; yet they like this world better than all.

Section III.—The third inquiry is, why hope is compared to a helmet. First. The helmet defends the head, a principal part of the body, from bullet and sword: so this 'hope of salvation' defends the soul, the principal part of man, and the principal faculties of that, whereby no dangerous impression can by Satan or sin be made on it. Temptations may trouble, but cannot hurt, except their darts enter the will, and leave a wound there, by drawing it to some consent and liking of them; from which this helmet of hope, if it be of the right make, and sits sure on the Christian's head, will defend him. It is hard to draw him into any treasonable practice against his prince, who is both well satisfied of his favour at present, and stands also upon the stairs of hope, expecting assuredly to be called up within a while to the highest preferment that the court can afford, or his king give. No, the weapons of rebellion and treason are usually forged and fashioned by discontent. When subjects take themselves to be neglected and slighted by their prince, think their preferments

Digitized by Google

are now at an end, and must look for no favours to come from him; this prepares them to receive every impression of disloyalty that any enemy to the king shall attempt to stamp them with; as in the Israelites, who thinking the men of Judah (of whose tribe the king was) had got a monopoly of his favour, and themselves shut out from sharing equally with them therein; how soon are they, even at a blast or two of Sheba's seditious trumpet, made rebels against their sovereign! 'We have no part in David,' saith Sheba, 'neither have we any inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel,' 2 Sam. xx. 1. And see how this treason runs, even like a squib upon a rope, verse 2; 'Every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba.' Thus, if once the soul fears it hath no part in God, and expects no inheritance from him, I know no sin so great, but it may be drawn to commit. Secondly, As the helmet defends the soldier's head from being wounded, so his heart also from swooning. It makes him bold and fearless in battle, though amidst swords and bullets. Goliath, with his helmet of brass and other furniture, how confidently and daringly did the man come on, as if he had been so inclosed in his armour, that it was impossible any weapon could come near to deliver a message of death unto him. This made him carry his crest so high, and defy a whole host, till at last he paid his life for his pride and folly. But here is a helmet, which, whoever wears, need never be put to shame for his holy boasting. God himself allows him so to do, and will bear him out in this rejoicing of his hope: 'They shall not be ashamed that wait for me,' Isaiah xlix. 23. This made holy David so undaunted in the midst of his enemies, 'Though a host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear,' Psa. xxvii. 3. His hope would not suffer his heart so much as to beat within him, for any fear of what they could do to him; he had his helmet of salvation on, and therefore he saith, verse 6, 'Mine head shall be lifted up above mine enemies round about me.' A man cannot drown so long as his head is above water. Now, it is the proper office of hope to do this for the Christian in times of any danger, Luke xxi. 28: 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.' A strange time, one would think, for Christ then to bid his disciples lift up their heads in, when they see other men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, ver. 26; yet now is the time of the rising of their sun, when others' is setting, the blackness of darkness is overtaking others; because now the Christian's feast is coming, for which hope hath saved its stomach so long.—'Your redemption draweth nigh.' Two things make the head hang down,—fear and shame; hope easeth the Christian's heart of both these, and so forbids him to give any sign of a desponding mind by a dejected countenance. I come now to lay down the one general point of doctrine, from which our whole discourse on this piece of armour shall be drawn.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE USE OF HOPE IN THE CHRISTIAN'S WARFARE, AND OF THE HIGH AND NOBLE EXPLOITS IT RAISETH THE CHRISTIAN TO UNDERTAKE.

HOPE is a grace of singular use and service to us all along our spiritual warfare and Christian course. We are directed to 'take the helmet of salvation:' and this is not for some particular occasion, and then hang it up till another extraordinary strait calls us to take it down, and use it again; but we must take it so as never to lay it aside, till God shall take off this helmet, to put on a crown of glory in the room of it. 'Be sober, and hope to the end,' is the apostle Peter's counsel, 1 Pet. i. 13. There are some engines of war that are of use but now and then; as ladders for scaling a town or fort, which done, they are laid aside for a long time, and not missed. But the helmet is of continual use. We shall need it as long as our war with sin and Satan lasts. The Christian is not beneath hope, so long as above ground; nor above hope so long as he is beneath heaven Indeed, when once he enters the gates of that glorious city, then farewell hope, and welcome love for ever. He may say, with the holy martyr, armour becomes earth, but robes heaven. Hope goes into the field, and waits on the Christian till the last battle be fought and the field cleared, and then faith and hope together carry him in the chariot of the

Digitized by Google

promise to heaven's door, where they deliver up his soul into the hands of love and joy, which stand ready to conduct him into the blissful presence of God. But that I may speak more particularly of hope's serviceableness to the Christian, and the several offices it performeth for him, I shall reduce all to four heads.

First, Hope of salvation puts the Christian upon high and noble exploits. It is a grace born for great actions. Faith and hope are the two poles on which all the Christian's noble enterprises turn. As carnal hope excites carnal men to their achievements, which gain them renown in the world, so is this heavenly hope influential unto the saint's undertakings. What makes the merchant sell house and land, and ship his whole estate away to the other end of the world, and this amidst a thousand hazards from pirates, waves, and winds, but the hope of getting a greater by this bold adventure? What makes the daring soldier rush into the furious battle, into the very mouth of death itself, but the hope of snatching honour and spoil out of its jaws?—hope in his helmet, shield, and all, which makes him laugh in the face of all danger. In a word, what makes the scholar beat his brains so hard, sometimes with the hazard of breaking them, by over-straining his part with too eager and hot a pursuit of learning, but the hope of commencing some degrees higher in the knowledge of those secrets in nature which are locked up from vulgar understanding?—who, when he hath attained his desire, is paid but little better for all his pains and study, which have worn nature in him to the stumps, than he is that tears the flesh off his hands and knees with creeping up some craggy mountain, which proves but a barren, bleak place, to stand in, and wraps himself up in the clouds from the sight of others, leaving him little more to please himself with but this, that he can look over other men's heads, and see a little farther than they. Now if these hopes can prevail with men, so as to have such fixed resolutions for the obtaining of these poor, sorry things, which borrow part of their goodness from men's fancy and imaginations, how much more effectual must the Christian's hope of eternal life be, to provoke him to the achievement of more noble exploits! Let a few instances suffice.

Section I.—This hope raiseth in the Christian an heroic resolution against those lusts that held him before in bondage. The Israelites, who suffered so tamely under their Egyptian burdens, without any attempt made by them to shake off the oppressor's yoke, when Moses came from God to give them hope of an approaching salvation, and his report had gained some credit by them, what a mighty change the impression of their newly-conceived hope made upon them! On a sudden their courage returns, and their blood, which anguish and despair had so long chilled, grows warm again. They who before hardly durst let their groans be heard (so broken were their spirits with hard labour) now, fortified with hope, burst open their prison-doors, and march out of Egypt toward the place of rest promised, in defiance of all the power and wrath of enraged Pharaoh, who pursued them. Truly, thus it is with a soul in regard of sin's bondage. O how impotent and poor-spirited is a soul void of this heavenly hope! What a tame slave hath Satan of him! He is the footstool for every base lust to trample upon. He suffers the devil to ride him whither he pleaseth, without wincing. No puddle so filthy, but Satan may draw him through with a thread: the poor wretch is well enough contented with his ignoble servitude, because he knows no better master than him he serves, nor better wages than the swill of his sensual pleasures, which his lusts allow him; but let the news of salvation come to the ear of this sin-deluded soul, and a spiritual eye be given him to see the transcendant glory thereof, with a crevice of hope set open to him, that he is the person that shall inherit it, if willing to make an exchange of Satan for Christ, and of the slavery of his lusts for the liberty of his Redeemer's service; O what havoc then doth the soul begin to make among his lusts! He presently vows the death of them all, and sets his head at work how he may soonest and most effectually rid his hands of them. 'Every man that hath this hope, purifieth himself, even as he is pure;' 1 John iii. 3. He now looks upon his lusts with no better eye than a captive prince would do on his cruel keepers, out of whose hands could he make his escape, he should presently enjoy his crown and kingdom; and therefore meditates his utmost revenge upon them. There may be some hasty purposes taken up by carnal men against their lusts, upon some accidental discontent they meet with

Digitized by Google

now and then in the prosecution of them; but, alas! the swords they draw against them are soon in their sheathes again, and all the seeming fray comes to nothing in the end. They, like Esau, go out full and angry, but a present comes from their lusts which bribes them from hurting them; yea, so reconciles them to them, that, as he did by his brother, they can fall upon the necks of those lusts, to kiss them, which awhile before they threatened to kill, and all for want of a true hope of heaven. He that hath a mind to provide himself with arguments against sin's motions, need not go far to seek them: but he that handles this one well, and drives it home to the head, will not need many more. What is the sin this would not prostrate? Art thou tempted to any sensual lust? Ask thy hope what thou expectest to be in heaven. Canst thou yield to play the beast on earth, who hopest to be made like the pure and holy angels in heaven? Is it a sin of profit which bewitcheth thee? Is not the hope of heaven a spell strong enough to charm this devil? Can gold bear any sway with thee, thou that hopest to be heir of that city where gold bears no price? Wherefore is that blissful place said to be paved with gold, but to let us know, it shall be there trampled upon as of no account? And wilt thou let it now lie in thy heart, that will ere long be laid under thy feet? It it a sin of revenge? Dost thou not hope for a day when thy dear Saviour will plead thy cause? And what need hast thou then to take his work out of his hand? Let him be his own judge, who hath no hope; the Judge, when he comes, will take thy part.

Section II.—This hope encourages and enables the Christian to condemn the present world, with all its pomp, treasure, and pleasure, to which the rest of the sons of men are basely enslaved. When once faith makes discovery of the land which the Christian hath lying in heaven, and by hope he begins to calculate upon it, as that which he shall shortly take up at his removal from earth; truly then the price of this world's felicity falls low in his account: he can sell all his hopes from it very cheap, yea, he can part with what he hath in hand of this world's growth, when God calls him to it, more freely than Alexander did the cities he took; because when all this is gone, he shall leave himself a better hope than that great monarch had to live upon. The hope of heaven leaves a blot upon the world in the Christian's thoughts. It is no more now to him, than the asses were to anointed Saul. We are told of some Turks, who have, upon the sight of Mahomet's tomb, put out their eyes, that they might not defile them, forsooth, with any common object, after they had been blessed with seeing one so sacred. I am sure many a gracious soul there hath been, who, by a prospect of heaven's glory set before the eye of their faith, have been so ravished by the sight, that they have desired God even to seal up their eyes by death, with Simeon, who would not by his good-will have lived a day after that blessed hour in which his eyes had beheld the salvation of God. Abraham was under the hope of this salvation, and therefore, he 'sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country,—for he looked for a city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God:' Heb. xi. 9, 10. Canaan would have satisfied him well enough if God had not told him of a heaven that he meant to give him, in comparison to which Canaan is now but 'Cabul,' a dirty land in his judgment. So Paul tells us not only the low thoughts he hath himself of the world, but as they agree with the common sense of all believers, whose hope is come to any settlement; 'for our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour,' Phil. iii. 20. Mark, he sets the saints with their back upon earth; and draws his reason from their hope,—'from whence we look,' &c. Indeed, he that looks on heaven, must needs look off earth. The soul's eye can as little as the body's be above and below at the same time. Every man converseth most where he hopes to receive his greatest advantage. The publican sits at the receipt of custom, there comes in his gains; the courtier stands at his prince's elbow; the merchant, you must look for in his warehouse, or at the exchange: but the Christian's hope carries him by all these doors. Here is not my hope, saith the soul, and therefore not my haunt: my hope is in heaven, from whence I look for the Saviour, and my salvation to come with him; there I live, walk, and wait. Nothing but a steadfast, well-grounded hope of salvation, can buy off the creature's worldly hopes. The heart of man cannot be in the world without a

Digitized by Google

hope; and if it hath no hope for heaven, it must of necessity have a hope for earth, such as it can afford. What can suit an earthly heart better than an earthly hope? And that which is a man's hope, though poor and trifling, is highly prized, and with difficulty parted with; as we see in a man who is likely to be drowned, and hath only some weed by the bank-side to hold by, he will die with it in his hand rather than let go; he will endure blows and wounds rather than loose his hold; nothing can take him from it, but that which he hopes may serve better to save him from drowning. Thus it is with a man whose hope is set upon the world, and whole happiness expected from thence. O how such an one hugs and hangs about the world! You may as soon persuade a fox to come out of his hole, where he hath taken sanctuary from the dogs, as such an one to cast off his hopes! No, he is undone without this pelf and that honour; it is that which he hath laid up his hopes in, and hope and life are kept in the same hand. Scare and threaten him with what you will, still the man's heart will hold its own; yea, throw hell-fire into his bosom, and tell him this love of the world, and making gold his hope, will damn him another day, still he will hold to his way. Felix is an instance of this, Acts xxiv. 26. Paul preached an excellent sermon before him; and though the preacher was at the bar, and Felix on the bench, yet God so armed the word that he trembled to hear the prisoner 'speak of righteousness, and judgment to come:' yet this man, notwithstanding his conscience was struggling with the fears of judgment, and some sparks of Divine vengeance had taken fire on him, could at the same time be sending out his heart on a covetous errand, to look for a bribe, for want of which he left that blessed servant of God in his bloody enemies' hands; for it is said, 'he hoped that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.' But he missed his market; for, as a sordid hope of a little money made him basely refuse to deliver Paul, so the blessed hope which Paul had for another world made him more honourably disdain to purchase his deliverance at his hands with a bribe.

Section III.—This hope of salvation, where it is steadfast, makes the Christian active and zealous for God. It is called 'a lively hope,' 1 Pet. i. 3. They are men of mettle that have it; you may expect more from him than many others, and not be deceived. Why are men dull and heavy in the service of God? Truly because their hopes are so. Hopeless and lifeless go together. No wonder the work goes hardly off hand, when men have no hope to be well paid for their labour. He that thinks he works for a song, will not sing at his work, —I mean forward it. The best customer is sure to be served best and first; and him we count the best customer whom we hope will be the best paymaster. If God be thought so, we will leave all to do his business. This made Paul engage so deeply in the service of the gospel, even to loose his worldly friends, and lay his own life at stake; it was 'for the hope of the promise,' Acts xxvi. 6. This made the other Israelites that feared God follow the trade of godliness so close: ver. 7: 'Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.' Mark, they are both instant and constant; they run with full speed, stretching themselves forth as in a race, and this night and day; no stop nor halting. And what is it keeps them in breath? Even the hope that they shall at last come to that salvation promised. Nothing better to clear the soul of sloth and listlessness of spirit in the service of God than hope well improved and strengthened. It is the very physic which the apostle prescribes for this disease: Heb. vi. 11, 12, 'We desire every one of you to shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, that ye be not slothful.'

Section IV.—Hope begets in a Christian a holy impatience after farther attainments, especially when it grows to some strength: the higher our hopes of salvation rise, the more will our hearts widen themselves in holy desires: Rom. viii. 23, 'Not only they, but we ourselves also which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit the redemption of our body.' Methinks rejoicing would better become them for what they had already, than groaning for what they have not. Who can better stay long for their dinner than they who have their stomachs stayed with a good breakfast? This would hold in bodily food, but not spiritual. No doubt the sweetness which they tasted from their first-fruits in hand did cheer their spirits; but the thoughts of what was behind made them groan. Hope

Digitized by Google

waits for all, and will not let the soul sit down contented till all the dishes be on the board, till the whole harvest that stands on the field of the promise be reaped; yea, the more the Christian hath received in partial payments, the deeper groans hope makes the soul fetch for what is behind; and that, First, Because these foretastes acquaint the Christian more with the nature of those joys which are in heaven, and so enlarge his understanding to have more raised conceptions of the felicity which those enjoy that are arrived there; and the increasing of his knowledge must needs enlarge his desires, and those desires break out into sad groans to think what sweet wine is drank in full bowls by glorified saints, and he living where only a sip is allowed that doth not satisfy, but kindle his thirst. It is harder now for him to live on this side heaven than before he knew so much. He is like one that stands at the door where the company sit at a rich feast; he hears how merry they are; through the key-hole he sees what variety they have; and, by a little which he tastes from the trenchers brought out, he learns how delicious their fare is. O how such an one's teeth would water after their cheer, which another misseth not who hears not of it, or only hears, but tastes not of their dainties! The nearer the soul stands to heaven, and the more he knows of their joys, the more he blesses them and pities himself. None long for heaven more than those who enjoy most of heaven: all delays now are exceedingly tedious. Their continual moan is, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' The last year is thought longer by the apprentice than all his time before, because now it is nearer out; and if delays be so tedious, what then are desertions to such a soul who hath had his hopes of salvation raised high by the sweet illapses of the Spirit and foretastes of glory! No doubt Moses's death so nigh Canaan, after he had tasted of the fruit of the land at the hand of the spies, was exceedingly grievous. To lose a child grown up, when we seem ready to reap our hopes conceived of him, is more than to part with two in the cradle, that have not yet drawn out our expectations. The Christian, indeed, cannot quite loss his hopes, yet he may have them nipped, as a forward spring by after-claps of winter weather pinches so much the more, because the warm beams of the sun had made the herbs come forth and disclose themselves. And so desertions from God make the saddest impressions upon those, above all others, whose expectation had advanced far, and, by the present sense of Divine goodness, been unfolded into a kind of rejoicing through hope of glory; now to meet with a damp from the frowns of the Almighty, and to be benighted by the withdrawing of that light which so ravished it, how dreadful must this sudden change be! Secondly, These present attainments of grace or comfort embolden the soul to expect yet more, and so provoke the Christian to press on for the full payment of all. See both these in David, Psalm lxiii. 7, 'Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.' The present boon which he hath got, makes him rejoice in hope of what is yet to come, and by this scent he is carried out with full cry to pursue the chase for more, as appears in the next words, verse 1, 'My soul followeth hard after thee.' And no wonder, if we consider that God gives his people their experiences with this very notion stamped on them, that is, to raise their expectations for farther mercies at his hand: Hosea ii. 15, 'I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.' God is there speaking to a soul converted and newly taken into covenant, what blessings he will bestow on it as the happy effects of its reconciliation to God and marriage with Christ; and he alludes to his dealing with Israel, who came out of a desolate wilderness into a pleasant, fruitful country, in the very entrance whereof this Achor lay, which when God gave them, he would not have them look on it as in itself it was, a little spot of ground, and not so much worth, but as the opening of a door through which he would undertake to let them into the possession of the whole land in process of time; which circumstance, believed by them, made Joshua advance his banners with so much courage against the proudest of his enemies, well knowing man could not shut that door upon them which God had opened. Thus every particular assistance God gives the Christian against any corruption, is intended by God to be an Achor, a door of hope, from which he may expect the total overthrow of that cursed seed in his bosom. When he adds the least degree of strength to his grace or comfort, he gives us a door of hope that he will consummate both in glory. O! what courage must

Digitized by Google

this needs bring to thee, poor heart, in thy fears and faintings. Paul had many enemies at Ephesus to oppose him; but having 'an effectual door opened unto him,' for his encouragement, he went on undauntedly, 1 Cor. xvi. 9. As an army after stubborn resistance by the enemy, who labour what they can to keep them out, the gate of the city flies open, then the soldiers press in amain with a shout; thus, after much wrestling with God for pardon of sin, or strength against sin, the door of the promise flies open, and God comes in with some assisting, comforting presence: now hope takes heart, and makes the soul fall on with double zeal.

CHAPTER IV.

SHEWETH HOW HOPE MAKES THE CHRISTIAN CONTENT WITH AND FAITHFUL IN THE MEANEST PLACE AND LOWEST EMPLOYMENT THAT GOD ORDERS FOR HIM.

SECONDLY, as hope raiseth the Christian's spirit to attempt great exploits, so it makes him faithful in the meanest and lowest services that the providence of God calls him to: for the same Providence lays out every one his work and calling, which sets bounds for their habitations on the earth. Some he sets on the high places of the earth, and appoints them honourable employment: others he pitcheth on lower ground, and orders them, in some obscure corner, to employ themselves about work of an inferior nature all their life; and we need not be ashamed to do that work which the great God sets us about. The Italians truly say, No man fouls his hands by exercising his own calling. Now, to encourage every Christian to be faithful in his particular place, he hath made promises that are applicable to them all. Promises are like the beams of the sun; they shine as freely in at the window of the poor man's cottage as of the prince's palace; and these hope trades with, and these animate the Christian at his work. Indeed, we are no more faithful in our callings than as we are influenced by faith and hope therein. Now, observe, God lays his promise so that it may strengthen our hands and hearts against the chief discouragement that weakens them in their callings. The great discouragement of those high employments (magistracy and ministry) is the difficulty of the province, and the opposition they find from the angry world: these, therefore, are guarded and supported with such promises as may fortify their hearts against the force and fury with which the world comes forth to oppose them: 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee; be strong and of good courage,' Joshua i. 5, 6. This promise was given to Israel's chief magistrate; and the minister's promise suits well with this, as having ordinarily the same difficulties, enemies, and discouragements,—'Go, teach all nations; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,' Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Again, the temptation that usually haunts persons in low and ignoble callings, is the meanness of them, which occasions discontent and envy in some, to see themselves on the floor, and their brother preferred to more honourable services: in others, dejection of spirit, as if they were, like the eunuch, but dry trees, unprofitable, and brought no glory to God, while others, by their more eminent places and callings, have the advantage of being highly serviceable to God in their generations. Now, to arm the Christian against this temptation, and remove this discouragement, God hath annexed as great a reward in the promise to his faithfulness in the meanest employment as the most honourable is capable of. What is there more mean and despicable than the servants' employment? yet no less than heaven itself is promised to them, if faithful. Col. iii. 23, he is speaking to such: 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.' Where observe, First, What honour he puts on the poor servant's work!—'he serves the Lord Christ;' yea, in the lowest piece of work that belongs to his office: his drudgery is divine service, as well as his praying and hearing; for he saith, 'Whatever ye do.' Again, observe the reward that is laid up for such; and that is as great as he shall receive who hath been faithful in ruling kingdoms,—'The reward of the inheritance.' As if God had said, Be not, O my child, out of love with thy homely work; ere long thou shalt sit as high as he that sways sceptres; though your employment now be not the same with his, yet your acceptation is the same, and so shall your reward also. Thus we see, as

Digitized by Google

we bestow more abundant honour on those members of our body, which we think less honourable; so doth Christ with those members of his body, which, by reason of their low place in the world, may be thought to be most despised; he puts an abundant honour upon them in his promise; and where hope is raised, the Christian cannot but take sweet satisfaction from the expectation thereof. The poor ploughman that is a saint, and ploughs in hope of reaping salvation, is as well contented with his place and work, as the courtier is with his. Think of this, when any of you have a servant to choose; if you would have your work faithfully and heartily done, employ such about it (if they can be had) as have a hope of salvation; this will not suffer them to wrong you, though they could: their helmet will defend them from such temptations. Jacob was a true drudge for his master, Laban, by day and night, though he used him none of the best, in reducing and changing his wages so often; but Jacob served in hope, and expected his reward from a better master than Laban, and this made him faithful to an unfaithful man. Joseph would not wrong his master, though at the request of his mistress; he chose to suffer his unjust anger, rather than accept of her unchaste love. The evidence of this grace in a servant is better security for his faithfulness than a bond of a thousand pounds.

CHAPTER V.

SHEWETH THE MIGHTY INFLUENCE HOPE HATH UPON THE CHRISTIAN TO SUPPORT HIM IN HIS AFFLICTIONS; IN PARTICULAR WHAT HELP IT GIVES, AND HOW.

THIRDLY, This hope of salvation supports the soul in the greatest afflictions. The Christian's patience is, as it were, his back, on which he bears his burdens; and some afflictions are so heavy, that he needs a broad one to carry them well. But if hope lay not the pillow of the promise between his back and his burden, the least cross will prove insupportable; therefore it is called, 'The patience of hope,' 1 Thess. i. 3. There is a patience, I confess, and many know not a better, when men force themselves into a kind of quietness in their troubles, because they cannot help it, and there is no hope. This I may call a desperate patience, and it may do them some service for a while, and but for a while. If despair were a good cure for troubles, the damned would have more ease: for they have despair enough, if that would help them. There is another patience also very common in the world, and that is a dull, stupid patience, which, like Nabal's mirth, lasts no longer than they are drunk with ignorance; for they no sooner come to understand the true state they are in, but their hearts die within them. But the patience of hope, which we are now treating of, is a sober grace, and abides as long as hope lasts. When hope is lively and active, then it floats, yea, even danceth on the waters of affliction, as a sound ship doth in a tempestuous sea; but when hope springs a leak, then the billows break into the Christian's bosom, and he sinks apace, till hope, with much labour at the pump of the promise, clears the soul again. This was David's case, Psa. lxix. 1, 'Save me, O God, for the waters are come in into my soul.' What means he by coming unto his soul? Surely, no other than this, that they oppressed his spirit, and as it were, sued into his very conscience, raising fears and perplexities there, by reason of his sins, which at present put his faith and hope to some disorder, so that he could not for a while see to the comfortable end of his affliction, but was as one under water, covered with his fears; as appears by what follows, ver. 2, 'I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing.' He compares himself to one in a quagmire, that can feel no firm ground to bear him up; and observe whence his trouble rose, and where the waters made their entrance, ver. 5, 'O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee.' This holy man lay under some fresh guilt, and this made him so uncomfortable under his affliction, because he is saw his sin in the face of that, and tasted some displeasure from God for it in his outward trouble, which made it so bitter in the going down; and, therefore, when once he had humbled himself by confessing his sin, and was able to see the coast clear between heaven and him, so as to believe the pardon of his sin, and hope for good news from God again, he then returns to his sweet temper, and sings in the same affliction, where before he sunk.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—But more particularly I shall shew what powerful influence hope hath on the Chrisian in affliction, and how. First, it stills and silenceth him under affliction. It keeps the king's peace in the heart, which else would soon be in an uproar. A hopeless soul is clamorous: one while it chargeth God, another while it reviles his instruments. It cannot long rest, and no wonder, when hope is not there. Hope hath a rare art in stilling a froward spirit, when nothing else can; as the mother can make the crying child quiet by laying it to the breast, when the rod makes it cry worse. This way David took, and found it effectual; when his soul was unquiet, by reason of his present affliction, he lays it to the breast of the promise,—'Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God;' Psa. xlii. 5. And here his soul sweetly sleeps, as the child with the breast in his mouth; and that this was his usual way, we may think by the frequent instances we find; thrice we find him taking this course in two Psalms, xlii. and xliii. When Aaron and Miriam were so uncivil with Moses, and used him so ill in their foul language, no doubt it was a heavy affliction to the spirit of that holy man, and aggravation of his sorrow, to consider out of whose bow those sharp arrows came; yet it is said, 'Moses held his peace,' waiting for God to clear his innocency: and his patience made God, no doubt, the more angry, to see this meek man wronged, who durst trust him with the vindication of his name; and, therefore, with great speed he wiped off the dirt which they had thrown on him, before it could prejudice his good name in the thoughts of others. Indeed this waiting on God for deliverance in an afflicted state consists much in a holy silence, Psa. lxii. 1: 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God; from him cometh salvation;' or, as the Hebrew, 'My soul is silent.' It is a great mercy, in an affliction, to have our bodily senses, so as not to lie raving, but still and quiet, much more to have the heart silent and patient; and we find the heart is as soon heated into a distemper as the head. Now what the sponge is to the cannon, when hot with often shooting, hope is to the soul in multiplied afflictions; it cools the spirit, and meekens it, so that it doth not break out into distempered thoughts or words against God. Secondly, This hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye, sigh and sing all in a breath; it is called 'the rejoicing of hope,' Heb. iii. 6. And hope never affords more joy than in affliction. It is on a watery cloud that the sun paints those curious colours in the rainbow. 'Rejoice in hope of the glory of God; and not only so, but we glory in tribulations,' Rom. v. 3. Glorying is rejoicing in a ravishment, when it is so great, that it cannot contain itself within the Christian's own breast, but comes forth in some outward expression, and lets others know what a feast it sits at. The springs of comfort lie high indeed when the Christian's joy pours out at the mouth: and all this joy, with which the suffering saint is entertained, is sent in by hope at the cost of Christ, who hath provided such unspeakable glory for them in heaven as will not suffer them to bemoan themselves for those tribulations that befall them on the way to it. Hope breaks the alabaster-box of the promise over the Christian's head, and so diffuseth the consolations thereof abroad, which, like a precious ointment, have a virtue to exhilarate and refresh the spirit, so to heal the wounds, and remove the smart, which the Christian's poor heart may feel from its affliction. According to the apostle, ver. 5, 'Hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.' There are two graces, which Christ useth above any other, to fill the soul with joy,—faith and hope, because these two fetch all their wine of joy without door. Faith tells the soul what Christ hath done for it, and so comforts it: hope revives the soul with the news of what Christ will do: both draw at one tap,—Christ and his promise; whereas the other graces present the soul with its own inherent excellences: what it doth and suffers for him, rather than what he does and suffers for them; so that it were neither honourable for Christ, nor safe for the saint, to draw his joy from this vessel. Not honourable to Christ! This were the way to have the king's crown set on the subject's head, and cry hosannah to the grace of Christ in us, which is due only to the mercy of God to us; for thither we will carry our praise, whence we have our joy; and therefore upon our allegiance we are only to 'rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,' Phil. iii. 3. And it would be more safe to us than honourable for him, because of the instability of our

Digitized by Google

hearts, and unconstant actings of our graces, which are as often ebbing as flowing; and so our joy could not be constant, because our graces are not; but as these springs lie high or low, so would this rise and fall; yea, we were sure to drink more water than wine, oftener want joy than have it; whereas now the Christian's cup need never be empty, because he draws his wine from an undrainable fountain, that never sends any poor soul away ashamed, as the brook of our inherent grace would certainly do.

SECTION II.—*Quest.* But whence hath hope this virtue? Or what are the ingredients in hope's cordial that thus exhilarates the saint's spirit in affliction? *Ans.* First, Hope brings certain news of a happy issue, that shall shortly close up all the wounds made by his present sufferings. When God comes to save his afflicted servants, though he may come sooner than they hoped or looked for him, yet he doth not come unlooked for; salvation is what they calculate upon, Jer. xxix. 11: 'I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end;' that is, an end suitable to the hopes and expectations taken up by you. Hope is a prying grace; it is able to look beyond the exterior transactions of Providence: it can, by the help of the promise, peep into the very bosom of God, and read what thoughts and purposes are written there concerning the Christian's particular estate, and this it imparts to him, bidding him not to be at all troubled to hear God speaking roughly to him in the language of his providence; for, saith hope, I can assure thee he means thee well, whatever he saith that sounds otherwise: for as the law, which came hundreds of years after the promise made to Abraham, could not disannul it; so neither can any intervening afflictions make void those thoughts and counsels of love, which so long before have been set upon his heart for thy salvation. Now such an one must needs have a great advantage above others, for the pacifying and satisfying his spirit concerning the present proceedings of God towards him, because though the actings of God upon the outward stage of providence be now sad and grievous, yet he is acquainted with Heaven's plot therein, and is admitted as it were into the attiring room of his secret counsel, where he sees garments of salvation preparing, in which he shall at last be clad, and come forth with joy. The traveller, when taken in a storm, can stand patiently under a tree while it rains, because he hopes it is but a shower, and sees it clear up in one part of the heavens, while it is dark in another. Providence is never so dark and cloudy, but hope can see fair weather coming from the promise. 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh,' Luke xxi. 28; and that is as black a day as can come. When the Christian's affairs are most disconsolate, he may soon meet with a happy change. The joy of that blessed day comes 'in a moment; in the twinkling of an eye we shall be changed,' 1 Cor. xv. 52. In one moment sick and sad, in the next well and glad, never to know more what groans and tears mean. Now clad with the rags of mortal flesh, made miserable with a thousand troubles that attend it, in the twinkling of an eye arrayed with the robes of immortality, enriched with a thousand times more glory than the sun itself wears in that garment of light which now dazzleth our eyes. It is but for a moment (said a holy martyr to his fellow-sufferer in the fire with him), and our pain and sorrow is all over. Who can wonder to see a saint cheerful in his afflictions, that knows what good news he expects to hear from heaven, and how soon he knows not? You have heard of the weapon salve, that cures wounds at a distance; such a salve is hope. The saints' hope is laid up in heaven, and yet it heals all the wounds which they receive on earth. But this is not all; for as hope prophesies well concerning the happy end of the Christian's afflictions, so it assures him he shall be well attended while he lies under them. If Christ sends his disciples to sea, he means to be with them when they most need his company. The child that is well may be left awhile by the mother, but the sick one she will by no means stir from. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,' Isa. xliii. 2. You know what God said to Moses, when he was sick of his employment, and made so many excuses from his own inability, and all that he might have leave to lay down his commission,—'Go,' saith God, Exod. iv. 12, 'and I will be thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.'

Digitized by Google

And again, verse 14, 'Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well; and also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee.' Thus God animated him to like that hard providence which he was called to. Methinks I hear hope, as God's messenger, speaking after the same sort to the drooping soul, oppressed with the thoughts of some great affliction, and ready to conclude he shall never be able to stem so rough a tide, bear up, and cheerfully lift up his head above such surging waves. Go, O my soul, saith hope, for thy God will be with thee, and thou shalt suffer at his charge. Is not Christ thy brother? Yea, is he not thy husband? He, thou thinkest, can tell how to suffer, who was brought up to the trade, from the cradle to the cross. Behold, even he comes forth to meet thee, glad to see thy face, and willing to impart some of his suffering skill unto thee. That man indeed must needs carry a heavy heart to prison, who knows neither how he can be maintained there, nor delivered thence; but hope easeth the heart of both these.

Secondly, Hope assures the Christian not only of the certainty of salvation coming, but also of the transcendency of this salvation to be such as the sorrow of his present sufferings bears no proportion to the joy of that. This kept the primitive Christians from swooning, while their enemies let out their blood. They had the scent of this hope to exhilarate their spirits: 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man parish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day,' 2 Cor. iv. 16. Is not this strange, that their spirit and courage should increase with the losing of their blood? For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ver. 17. Behold here the difference between hopes of heaven, and hopes of the world. These latter are fanciful and slighty, seem great in hope, but prove nothing in hand; like Eve's apple, fair to look on, but sour in the juice, and bad of nourishment in the eating. It were well if men could in their worldly hopes come but to the unjust steward's reckoning, and for an hundred felicities they promise themselves from the enjoyments they pursue, find but fifty at last paid them: alas! they must not look to come to so good a market, that have to do with the creature, which will certainly put them to greater disappointments. They may bless themselves, if they please, for a while in their hopes, as the husbandman sometimes doth in the goodly show that he hath of corn standing upon his ground; but by that time they have reaped their crop, and thrashed out their hopes, they will find little besides straw and chaff, emptiness, and vanity, left them; a poor return, God knows, to pay them for the expense of their time and strength which they have laid out upon them, much less suitable to recompense the loss he is to put to in his conscience; for there are few who are greedy hunters after the world's enjoyments, that do drive their worldly trade without running in debt to their consciences. And I am sure he buys gold too dear, that pays the peace of his conscience for the purchase. But heaven is had cheap, though it be with the loss of all our carnal interests, even life itself. Who will grudge to part with the lease of a low-rented farm, in which he also hath but a few days left before it expires (and such our temporal life is), for the perpetuity of such an inheritance as is to be had with the saints in light? This hath ever made the faithful servants of God carry their lives in their hands, willing to lay them down; 'While they look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.'

Thirdly, As hope assures the soul of the certainty and transcendency of heaven's salvation, so also of the necessary subserviency that his afflictions have toward his obtaining this salvation. 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?' Luke xxiv. 26. As if Christ had said, What reason have you so to mourn, and take on for your Master's death, as if all your hopes were now lost? Ought he not to suffer? Was there any other way that he could get home, and take possession of his glory that waited for him in heaven? And if you do not grudge him his preferment, never be so inordinately troubled to see him onwards to it, though through the miry lane of suffering. And truly, the saint's way to salvation lies in the same road, Rom. viii 17: 'If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together,' only with this advantage, that his going before hath beaten it plain, so that now it may be forded, which but for him had been utterly impassable

Digitized by Google

to us. Afflictions understood with this motion, that they are as necessary for our waftage to glory, as water is to carry the ship to her port, (which may as soon sail without water, as a saint land in heaven, without the subserviency of afflictions;) this well understood, would reconcile the greatest afflictions to our thoughts, and make us delight to walk in their company. This knowledge Parisiensis calls *Unus de septum radiis doni scientiæ*—one of the seven beams of divine knowledge; for the want of which we call good evil, and evil good; think God blesseth us, when we are in the sunshine of prosperity, and curseth when our condition is overcast with a few clouds of adversity; but hope hath an eye that can see heaven in a cloudy day, and an anchor that can find firm land under a weight of waters to hold by; it can expect good out of evil. The Jews open their windows when it thunders and lightens, expecting, they say, their Messiah to come at such a time to them. I am sure, hope opens her window widest in a day of storm and tempest; Zeph. iii. 12: 'I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Lord.' And Micah vii. 7: 'Therefore will I look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' See what strong hold hope's anchor takes, and it is remarkable, if you observe the place; because all things were at so desperate a pass in the church's affairs, 'therefore,' saith the saint, 'I will look, I will wait.' Indeed God doth not take the axe into his hand to make chips; his people, when he is hewing them, and the axe goes deepest, they may expect some beautiful piece at the end of the work. It is a sweet meditation Parisiensis hath upon Rom. viii. 28: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God;'—*Ubi magis intrepida, magis pensata esse debes, quam inter co-operatios meos, et coadjutores meos?* Where, O my soul, shouldst thou be more satisfied, free of care and fear, than when thou art among thy fellow-labourers, and those that come to help thee to attain thy so much desired salvation, which thy afflictions do! They work together with ordinances and other providential dealings of God for your good, yea, thy chief good; and thou couldst as ill spare their help as any other means which God appoints thee. Should one find, on rising in the morning, some on his house-top tearing off the tiles, and with axes and hammers taking down the roof, he might at first be amazed and troubled at the sight, yea, think they are enemies come to do him mischief; but when he understands they are workmen sent by his father to mend his house, and make it better, which cannot be done without taking some of it down, he is satisfied to endure the present trouble, yea, thankful to his father, for the care and cost he bestows on him: the hope of what advantage will come of their work, makes him very willing to dwell a while amidst the ruins and rubbish of his old house. I do not wonder to see hopeless souls so impatient in their sufferings, sometimes even to distraction; alas! they fear presently, and have reason so to do, that they come to pull all their worldly joys and comforts down about their ears, which gone, what, alas! have they left to comfort them, who can look for nothing but hell in another world? But the believer's heart is eased of all this, because assured from the promise, that they are sent on a better errand to him from his heavenly Father, who intends him no hurt, but good, even to build the ruinous frame of his soul into a glorious temple at last, and these afflictions come among other means, to have a hand in the work, and this satisfies him, so that he can say, Lord, cut and hew me how thou pleasest, that at last I may be polished and framed according to the plan which love hath drawn into thy heart for me. Though some ignorant man would think his clothes spoiled when besmeared with fuller's earth or soap, yet one that knows the cleansing nature of them, will not be afraid to have them so used.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN, THAT GOD STAYS LONG BEFORE HE PERFORMS SOME PROMISES, AND THAT IT IS HOPE'S OFFICE THEN TO KEEP THE CHRISTIAN IN A WAITING POSTURE.

THE fourth and last office of hope propounded, is to quiet, and compose the heart, when the good things of the promise (so much longed for by the Christian) stay long before they are performed. Patience, I told you, is the back on

Digitized by Google

which the Christian's burdens are carried, and hope the pillow between the back and the burden to make it sit easy. Now patience hath two shoulders; one to bear the present evil, and another to forbear the future good promised. And as hope makes the burden of the present evil of the cross light, so it makes the longest stay of the future good promised, short; whereas without this, the creature could have neither strength to bear the one, nor patience to wait for the other; Lam. iii. 18, 'And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord;' implying thus much, that where there is no hope, there is no strength; the soul's comfort soon gives up the ghost, where all hope fails. God undertook for Israel's protection and provision in the wilderness; but when their dough was spent, and their store ended, which they brought out of Egypt, they fall foul with God and Moses; and why, but because their hope was spent as soon as their dough? Moses ascends the mount, and is but a few days out of their sight, and in all haste they must have a golden calf; and why? Because they never hope to see him more. This is the reason why God hath so few servants that will remain faithful to him, because he makes them wait for what he means to give, and they are impatient and cannot stay. You know what Naomi said to her daughters, Ruth i. 12, 13: 'If I should have a husband, and should also bear sons, would you tarry for them till they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands?' The promise hath salvation in its womb; but will a soul without heavenly hope stay till the promise ripens, and this happiness be grown up? No, surely, they will rather make some match with the beggarly creature, or any base lust which will pay them in some pleasure at present, than wait so long, though it be for heaven itself. Thus, as Tamar played the strumpet, because the husband promised her was not given her so soon as she desired, Gen. xxxviii.; so it is the undoing of many souls, because the comfort, joy, and bliss of the promise is withheld at present, and they are made to wait for their reward; therefore they throw themselves into the embraces of this adulterous world: 'Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,' 2 Tim. iv. 10. The soul only that hath this divine hope, will be found patiently to stay for the good of the promise.

SECTION I.—God often stays long before he fulfils his promise to his people. The promise contains the matter of all our hopes, called, therefore, 'The hope of the promise.' To hope without a promise, is to claim a debt that never was owing. Now the good things of the promise are not paid down presently; indeed then there would not be such need of promises. What need of a bond where the money is paid down? God promised Abraham a son, but he stayed many years for him after the bond of the promise was given. He promised Canaan to him and his seed, yet hundreds of years interposed between the promise and performance: Esau was spread into a kingdom before the heirs of the promise had their inheritance; yea, all the patriarchs, who were the third generation after 'Abraham, died, and received not the promise,' Heb. xi. 13. Simeon had a promise that he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ, Luke ii. 26; but this was not performed till he had one foot in the grave. In a word, those promises are the portion of all the saints, and may be claimed by one as well as another: their date is set in the book of God's decree, when to be paid, some sooner, some later, but not expressed in the promise. He hath engaged to answer the prayers of his people, and fulfil the desires of those that fear him, Psa. cxlv. 19; but it proves a long voyage sometimes before the praying saint hath the return of his adventure. There comes often a long and sharp winter between the sowing time of prayer and the reaping. He hears us, indeed, as soon as we pray, but we often do not hear of him so soon. Prayers are not long on their journey to heaven, but long coming thence in a full answer. Christ at this day in heaven hath not a full answer to some of those prayers which he put upon earth; therefore he is said 'to expect till his enemies be made his footstool,' Heb. x. 13. Promises we have for the subduing sin and Satan under our feet, yet we find these enemies still skulking within us, and many a sad scuffle we have with them before they are routed out of our hearts. And so of others: we may find sometimes the Christian, as great an heir as he is to joy and comfort, hardly able to shew a penny of this heavenly treasure in his purse. And for want of well pondering this one clause poor souls are often led into temptation, even to question their saintship. Such

Digitized by Google

promises are the saint's portion, saith one, but I cannot find them performed to me, therefore I am not a saint; many a prayer I have sent to heaven, but I hear no news of them; the saints are conquerors over their lusts, but I am often foiled and worsted by mine; there is a heaven of comfort in the promise, but I am, as it were, in the belly of hell, swallowed up with fears and terrors. Such are the reasonings of poor souls in the distress of their spirits; whereas all this trouble they put themselves to might be prevented if they had faith to believe this one principle of undoubted truth—that God performs not his promises all at once; and what they want in hand, they may see on the way coming to them.

SECTION II.—When God stays long before he makes payment of the promise, then it is the believer's duty to wait for it: 'Though it tarry, wait for it,' Hab. ii. 3. He is speaking there of the good of the promise which God intended to perform in the appointed time: because it might tarry longer than their hasty hearts would, he bids them wait for it. As one that promiseth to come to a friend's house sends him word to sit up for him, and though he tarry later than ordinary he will come at last. What! wait, when we have stayed so long, and no sight of God's coming, after this prayer and that sermon, so many long looks given at the window of his ordinances and providences, and no tidings to be heard of his approach in mercy and comfort to my soul; and after this, still am I bid wait? This is hard work. True, to flesh and blood it is; yea, weak faith is often out of breath, and prone to sit down or turn back, when it hath gone to meet God in the returns of his mercy, and misseth him; and therefore the apostle ushers in this duty with an affectionate prayer, 2 Thess. iii. 5, 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.' He hath laid down a strong ground of consolation for them in the preceding chapter, in that 'they were chosen to salvation, and called by the gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,' ver. 13, 14, and assured them that God, who is faithful, would establish them and keep them 'from evil,' ver. 3: he means, they should not miscarry, and at last fall short of the glory promised; but being sensible how difficult a work it was for them, amidst their own present weaknesses, the apostacies of others, and the assaults of Satan upon themselves, to hold fast the assurance of their hope unto the end, he turns himself from them to speak to God for them,—'The Lord direct your hearts;' and as if he had said, It is a way you will never find, a work you will never be able to do of yourselves thus to wait patiently till Christ come and bring the full reward of the promise with him, 'the Lord,' therefore, 'direct your hearts' into it. Moses, before he ascended the mount, had a fear and jealousy of what afterwards proved too true, that the Israelites' unbelieving hearts would not have the patience to wait for his return, when he should stay some while with God out of their sight; to prevent which he gave express command, before he went up, that they should tarry there for him, Exod. xxiv. 14. Indeed, a duty more contrary to our proud hearts than this, of waiting quietly and silently on God, I know not. We can make the great God bear our misconduct, and run after us, before we do what he commands: but if the promise comes not galloping full speed to us, we think it will never be with us. But why doth God, when he hath made a promise, make his people stay so long? I shall answer this question by asking another: Why doth God make any promise at all to his creatures? This may be well asked, considering how free God was from owing any such kindness to his creature, till, by the mere good pleasure of his will, he put himself into bonds, and made himself, by his promise, a debtor to his elect; and this proves the former question to be impertinent and over bold. As if some rich man should make a poor beggar that is a stranger to him his heir, and when he tells him this he should ask, But why must I stay so long for it? Truly, any time is too soon for him to receive a mercy from God, who thinks God's time in sending it too late. This hasty spirit is as grievous to God as his stay can be to us And no wonder God takes it so heinously, if we consider the bitter root that bears it. First, It proceeds from a selfishness of spirit, whereby we prefer our own content and satisfaction before the glory of God; and this becomes not a gracious soul. Our comfort flows in by the performance of the promise, but the revenue of God's honour is paid unto him by our humble waiting on him in the interval between the promise

Digitized by Google

and the performance, and is the main end why he forbears the paying it hastily. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and God surely may make us wait before the promise is given to our embraces by its full accomplishment: 'Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise,' Heb. x. 36. It is very fit the master should dine before the man; and if we like not a servant who thinks much of staying so long from his meal as is required, how much more must God dislike the rudeness of our impatient spirits, that would have our turn served in the comfort of the promise before he hath the honour of our waiting on him! Secondly, It proceeds from deep ingratitude, and this is a sin odious to God and man. 'They soon forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel,' Psa. cvi. 13. God was not behindhand with this people: it was not so long since he had given them an experiment of his power and truth; he had but newly lent them his hand, and led them dry-shod through a sea, with which they seemed to be much confirmed in their faith, and enlarged in their acknowledgments, ver. 12: 'Then believed they his words; they sang his praises.' One would have thought God's credit now would have gone for a great sum with them ever after; but it proved nothing so; they dare not trust God with so much as their bill of fare, what they shall eat and drink; and, therefore, it is said, they 'waited not for his counsel,' but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness; that is, they prevented the wisdom and providence of God, which would have provided well for them, if they could but have stayed. And why all this haste? 'They forgot his works.' They had lost the thankful sense of what was past, and therefore could not wait for what was to come.

SECTION III.—Hope will enable the soul to wait when the promise stays longest: it is the very nature of hope so to do, Lament. iii. 26: 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.' Hope groans when the mercy promised comes not, but does not grumble. Hope's groans are from the spirit, sighed out to God in prayer, Rom. viii. 26, and these lighten the soul of its burden of fear and solicitous care; whereas the groans of a hopeless soul are vented in discontented passions against God, and these are like a loud wind to a fire, that makes it rage more, Jer. xxv. 16: 'They shall drink and be moved, and be mad because of the sword that I shall send among them.' It is spoken of the enemies of God and his people. God had prepared them a draught, which should have strange effects, 'they should be moved.' As a man, whose brains are disturbed with strong drink, is restless, yea, is mad; as some when they are drunk quarrel with every one they meet; so should their hearts be filled with rage even against God himself, who runs his sword into their sides, because they had no hope to look for any healing of their wounds at his hand. But now where there is hope, the heart is soon pacified. Hope is the handkerchief that God puts into his people's hands, to wipe the tears from their eyes, which their present troubles, and long stay of expected mercies, draw from them, Jer. xxxi. 16, 17: 'Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy, and there is hope in the end.' This, with some other comfortable promises which God gave to this prophet in a vision, filled his heart with joy, that he was as much recruited and comforted, as a sick or weary man is after a night of sweet sleep, ver. 26: 'Upon this I awaked, and my sleep was sweet unto me.'

CHAPTER VII.

SHEWETH A THREEFOLD ASSURANCE WHICH HOPE GIVES THE CHRISTIAN, AND THEREBY QUIETS HIM IN WAITING FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF PROMISES, WHEN GOD STAYS LONG.

HOPE pacifies the Christian with a threefold assurance, when the promise seems to stay long. First, Hope assures the soul, that though God stays awhile before he performs the promise, yet he doth not delay. Secondly, That when he comes he will abundantly recompense his long stay. Thirdly, That while he stays to perform one promise, he will leave the comfort of another, to bear the Christian company in the absence of that.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—Hope assures the soul, that God will not delay, though he may stay. 'The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry,' Hab. ii. 3. How is this? Though it tarry, it will not tarry! How shall we reconcile this? Very well. Though the promise tarries till the appointed time, yet it will not tarry beyond it. 'When the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,' Acts vii. 17. As the herbs and flowers, which sleep all winter in their roots under ground, when the time of spring approacheth, presently they start forth off their beds, where they had lain so long unperceived; thus will the promise in its season. He delays, who passeth the time appointed; but he only stays that waits for the appointed time and then comes. Every promise is dated, but with a mysterious character; and for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us, when, indeed, we forget ourselves in being so bold to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that he comes not just then to us; as if a man should set his watch by his own hungry stomach, rather than by the sun, and then say it is noon, and chide because his dinner is not ready. We are over-greedy of comfort, and expect the promise should keep time with our hasty desires, which, because it doth not, we are discontented: a high piece of folly! The sun will not go the faster, by setting our watch forward; nor the promise come the sooner, for our attending it. It is true, what one saith, though God seldom comes at our day, because we seldom reckon right, yet he never fails his own day. The apostle, 2 Thess. ii. 2, 3, exhorts the church there, that they would not be shaken in mind, or be troubled, as that the day of Christ was at hand. But what need of this exhortation to saints, who look for their greatest joy to come with the approach of that day? Can their hearts be troubled, to hear the day of their redemption draws nigh, the day of refreshing is at hand? It was not, therefore, I conceive, the coming of that day, which was so unpleasing and so affrighting, but the time in which some seducers would have persuaded them to expect it as if it had been at the very doors, and would presently have surprised them in their generation: which had been very sad indeed, because then it would have come before many prophecies and promises had received their accomplishment, and by that means the truth of God would have gone off the stage with a slur; which must not be, as he tells them, ver. 3, 'For that day shall not come, except their come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.' And as that promise stays but till those intermediate truths, which have a shorter period, be fulfilled; so all the rest but wait what God hath appointed to intervene, and they punctually shall have their delivery in their set time. Thou art, may be, bleeding under a wounded spirit, a poor, broken-hearted creature, who liest steeping in thy tears for sin. The promise tells thee that God is nigh to revive thee, Isa. lvii. 15; yet thou comest from this prayer, and that sermon, but hast no sight of him, nor canst thou hear any more news of his coming than what the promise gives thee. See that God suffers no prejudice in thy thoughts, by his stay; but conclude that his time is not come, or else he would have been with thee ere this; and take heed of measuring God's miles by thy own scale, for his nigh may be thy far. God could have told his people the time when he meant to come with the performance of every promise, as easily as set it down in his own purpose; but he hath concealed it in most, as a happy advantage to our faith, whereby we may more fully express our confidence in waiting for that which we shall receive we know not when. Abraham's faith was great and strong, to follow God when he concealed the place he ment to lead him to, for 'he went he knew not whither,' Heb. xi. 8: so it requires great faith to rest satisfied with the promise when the time of payment is hid. But if we consider whom we trade with, we can have no reason to be the least jealous, no, not when he stays longest, that he will fail or delay us a moment longer than the set time. There are three causes why men break their times of payment.

First, Forgetfulness. Many remember not what they promise. The day comes, and it is quite out of their minds. Men seldom forget when they have to receive, but too often, when they have to pay. An extraordinary occasion must be sent to rub up the butler's memory, or else he will never think of his

Digitized by Google

promise while in prison. But God's promise is never out of his thoughts; he remembers his covenant, Psa. cv. 8: his people and their affairs are engraven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are always before him, Isa. xlix. 16. Though the preferment at Pharaoh's court made the butler forget his promise to Joseph; yet all the glory that Christ sees and enjoys in heaven, hath not the power to blot the remembrance of his promise to his people, who lie in chains of afflictions here below. And God would have his saints take notice of this to comfort themselves with while he comes. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,' Jer. xxix. 11.

Secondly, Unfaithfulness. A promise, with some, is no more than a collar on an ape's neck; you have them not a whit the faster by it, for they can slip off the obligation at their pleasure. May be they never intended performance, when they made the promise, but made use of it only as a key to lock up their intention of deceiving from your present knowledge. Others haply mean at present as they say, but soon grow sick of their engagement, upon sight of some disadvantage which their after-thoughts discover likely to befall them upon the performance: and therefore their wits are set to work to coin some handsome evasion to avoid the engagement, or at least delay the payment; which made Lysander say of some men, that they played with oaths and promises *(sicut pueri cum astragalis)* as children do at nine-pins: they will keep them if they can get anything by the performance; but if it be likely to prove a losing game, they will rather run in debt to their consciences by breaking them, than to their purse by their performance. But no fear of God; his name is truth and faithfulness. Now can truth itself lie, or faithfulness deceive? 'In my Father's house,' saith Christ, 'are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself,' John xiv. 2, 3. See here the candour and nakedness of our Saviour's heart: as if he had said, This is no excuse to be gone, that so I may, by a fair tale, leave you in hopes of that which shall never come to pass. No, did I know it otherwise than I speak, my heart is so full of love to you, that it would not have suffered me to put such a cheat upon you for a thousand worlds; you may trust me to go; for, as surely as you see me go, shall your eyes see me come again to your everlasting joy; the promises are none of them yea and nay, but yea and amen in him. He is wisdom as well as truth. As he is truth, he cannot wrong or deceive us in breaking his word; and being wisdom, it is impossible he should promise that which should prejudice himself; and therefore he makes no blots in his purposes or promises, but what he doth in either is immutable. Repentance is, indeed, an act of wisdom in the creature; but it presupposeth folly, which is incompatible with God. In a word, men too often are rash in promising, and therefore what they promise in haste, they perform at leisure; they consider not before they vow, and therefore inquire afterward whether they can stand to it; but the all-wise God needs not this. As in the creation he looked back upon the several pieces of that goodly frame, and saw them so exact that he took not up his pencil the second time to mend anything of the first draught: so in his promises, they are made with such infinite wisdom, that what he hath written he will stand to for ever. 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee to me in righteousness and in judgment,' Hosea ii. 19. Therefore for ever, because in righteousness and in judgment.

Thirdly, From impotency. Men's promises, alas! depend upon many contingencies. The man perhaps is rich when he seals the bond, and poor before the day of payment: a wreck at sea, a fire by land, or some other sad accident intervenes, that either quite impoverisheth him or necessitates him to beg farther time, with him in the gospel, Matt. xviii. 26; 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all:' but the great God cannot be put into such straits: 'The strength of Israel will not lie,' 1 Sam. xv. 29. As there is a lie of wickedness, when one promiseth what he will not perform; so there is a lie that proceeds from weakness, when a person cannot perform what he has promised. Thus, indeed, all men will be found liars to those that lean on them, called, therefore, lying vanities: vanities, as empty and insufficient: lying vanities, because they promise what they have not to give: but God is propounded as a sure bottom for our faith to rest on:

Digitized by Google

'Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,' Isa. xxvi. 4. His strength is such as needs not another's strength to uphold it. One man's ability to perform his promises depends on other's ability to pay theirs to him: if they fail, he is forced to fail. Thus, we see the breaking of one merchant proves the breaking of many others, whose estates were in his hands. But God's power is independent. Let the whole creation break, yet God is the same, as able to help as ever: 'Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation: the Lord God is my strength,' Hab. iii. 17, 18. O, how happy are the saints! a people that can never be undone, no, not when the whole world turns bankrupt, because they have his promise whose power fails not. The Christian cannot come to God when he hath not by him what he wants: 'How great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;' Psa. xxxi. 19. It is laid up, as a father hath his child's portion, in bags ready to be paid him when the time comes. The saint shall not stay a moment beyond the date of the promise. 'There is forgiveness with thee,' saith the psalmist; it stands ready for thee against thou comest.

Section II.—Hope assures the Christian, that though God stays long, yet he will make an abundant recompense when he comes. As the wicked get nothing by God's forbearing to execute his threatening, but the treasuring up of more wrath against the day of wrath; so the saints lose nothing by not having the promise presently paid, but rather treasure up more joy against the joyful day, when the promise shall be performed. Rom. ii. 7: 'To them who by patient continuance—seek for glory and honour, and eternal life.' Mark, it is not enough to do well, but to continue therein; nor that neither, except it be patient continuing in well-doing, in the midst of God's seeming delays; and whoever doeth this shall be rewarded for all his patience. Ploughing is hungry work; yet, because in hopes of reaping an abundant increase, the husbandman faints not. O, my soul, saith hope, thou that wantest thy dinner hold but out awhile, and thou shalt have dinner and supper served in together when night comes. The sick fits which the Christian hath in the absence of the promise, are all forgotten, and the trouble of them over, when once it comes, and he is feasted with the joy it brings, Prov. xiii. 12: 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life; that is, when it cometh in God's time, after long waiting, then it causeth an overflowing joy. As there is a time which God hath set for the ripening of the fruits of the earth; so there is a time set by God for the good things of the promise, which we are to wait for, and not unseasonably pluck them, like green apples, off the tree, as too many do, who, having no faith or hope to quiet their spirits until God's time comes, therefore snatch that, by unwarrantable means, which would in time drop ripe into their bosoms. And what get they by their haste? Alas! they find their enjoyments like corn reaped before it is fit for the sickle, wherewith he that bindeth the sheaves filleth not his bosom. Therefore we find this duty of waiting pressed under this metaphor, James v. 7: 'Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.' Stay God's time, till he comes according to his promise, and takes you off your suffering work; and be not hasty to shift yourselves out of trouble; and why so? 'Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receives the early and the latter rain; be ye also patient; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' The husbandman, (who, the proverb saith, is *dives in norum annum*,—rich in hope of the next year's crop,) though he gladly would have his corn in the barn, yet waits for its ripening in the ordinary course of God's providence. When the former rain comes, he is joyful, but yet desires the latter rain also, and stays for it, though long in coming. And do we not see, that a shower sometimes falls close to the time of harvest, that plumps the ear, to the great increase of the crop, which some lose, who, through distrust of Providence, put in their sickle too soon? Mercies come fullest when longest waited for. Christ did not so soon supply them with wine at the marriage of Cana, as his mother desired: but they had the more for staying awhile. There is a double fulness which the Christian may hope to find in those enjoyments that he hath with long patience waited for. First, A fulness of duration. Enjoyments snatched out of God's hand, are guests, come not to stay long: like David's child, born in adultery, they com-

Digitized by Google

monly die in the cradle: they are like some fruit gathered green, which soon rots. Is it riches that is thus got? Some are said to make haste to get rich, Prov. xxviii. 20. They cannot, by a reasonable diligence in their particular calling, and exercise of godliness, wait upon God; no, the promise doth not gallop fast enough for them; on, therefore, they spur, and by base practices make haste to be rich. But God makes as much haste to melt their estate, as they to gather it. No care and providence of man will keep that estate from God's curse, which is got by so sinful a pursuit, Prov. xiii. 11: 'Wealth gotten by vanity' (that is, vain, unwarrantable courses,) 'shall be diminished.' Like the unsound fat which great drinkers and greedy eaters gain to themselves, it hath in it that which will hasten its ruin, Prov. xxi. 6: 'The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death.' The meaning is, such estates are tossed like a ball from one to another, and are not likely to stay so long in any hand, till they come into the godly man's, whom God often by his providence makes heir to such men's riches, as you may see, Job. xxii. 17; Eccles. ii. 26. Again, is it comfort and inward joy? Some make too much haste for this; they are not like other Christians, who have a wet seed-time, and are content to wait for joy till harvest, or at least, till it be in some forwardness; and the seed of grace, which was sown in tears of humiliation, appears above ground in such solid evidences, as in some degree to satisfy them concerning the reality and truth of the same. Then indeed the sincere Christian's spirit begins to cheer up, and his comfort holds, yea, increaseth more and more, Prov. xiii. 9: 'The light of the righteous rejoiceth;' that is, over all his fears and doubts. But there are others so hasty, that they are catching at comfort, before ever they were led into acquaintance with godly sorrow. They are delivered without pain, and their faith flames forth into the joy of assurance before any smoke of doubtings and fears were seen to rise in their hearts; but, alas! it is as soon lost as got, like a too forward, nipping spring, that makes the husbandman weep at harvest, or a fair sunshiny day in winter, that is the breeder of many foul ones after it. The stony ground hearer is an instance for this, Mark iv., whose joy was as quickly down as up. A storm of persecution or temptation comes, and immediately he is offended. In a word, take but one instance more, and that is in point of deliverance. Such hasty spirits, as cannot wait for the promise to open their prison-door, and God to give them a release in his time, but break out of prison, and by some unwarrantable practice wind themselves out of trouble, we see how miserably they befool themselves; for while they think, by the midwifery of their sinful policy, to hasten their deliverance, they kill it in the birth, which, had it come in God's time, might have stayed many a fair day with them. The Jews are a sad instance of this, who, though God gave them such full security for their deliverance from the Babylonian hand, would yet take their own course, hoping, it seems, to compass it sooner by policy than they could expect it to be effected by Providence, and therefore to Egypt they went in all haste, not doubting but they should thence bring their deliverance; but, alas; it proved far otherwise; for all they got was to have more links added to their chain of bondage, and their lordly masters to use greater rigour upon them, which God by his prophet bids them thank their own hasty unbelieving spirits for: 'Thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be your strength, and ye would not,' Isa. xxx. 25. Indeed, if we look on such as have quietly waited by hope for God's coming to their help, we shall find they ever speed well. Joshua, who bore up against all discouragements from God and man, stedfastly believing, and patiently waiting for the land God had promised, did he not live to walk over their graves in the wilderness, that would have turned back to Egypt; and to be witness to their destruction also, who presumptuously went up the hill to fight the enemy, and take the land (as they vainly hoped) before God's time was come? Yea, did not he at last divide the land, and lay his bones in a bed of honour, after he had lived to see the promise of God happily performed to his people? So David, whose hope and patience were admirable in waiting for the kingdom, after he had the promise of it, especially if we consider what fair opportunities he had to take cruel Saul out of the way, whose life alone stood between him and the throne; neither did he want matter to fill up a declaration for the satisfaction and pacifying the minds of the

Digitized by Google

people, if he had had a mind to have gone this way to the crown; but he knew those plausible arguments for such a fact, which would have pleased the multitude, would not have pacified his own conscience, and this stayed his hand from any such ripping open the womb of the promise, to come to the crown, but left it to go its full time; and he lost nothing by it.

Secondly, There flows in a fulness of benediction with an enjoyment reaped in God's full time, which is lost for want of patience to wait. Now this benediction is paid in to the waiting soul's bosom two ways. First, He hath it sweetened to him with the love and favour of God for his comfort, which he cannot so well expect that carves for himself, and cannot stay for God in his own time to lay it on his trencher. There is guilt ever to be found in the company of impatience and distrust; and where guilt is contracted in the getting of an enjoyment, there can be little sweetness tasted when it comes to be used. Oh, guilt is an embittering thing! it keeps the soul in a continual fear of hearing ill news from heaven; and a soul in fear is not in a situation to relish the sweetness of a mercy. Such an one may haply have a little tumultuous joy, and warm himself awhile at this rash fire of his own kindling, till he comes to have some serious discburse with his own heart, about the way and manner of getting the enjoyment, and this is sure to send such a damp to the heart of the poor creature, as will not suffer that fire long to burn clear. Oh what a stab is it to the heart of an oppressor, to say of his great wealth, as that king of his crown, 'Here is a fair estate, but God knows how I came by it!' What a wound to the joy of the hypocrite,—I have pretended to a great deal of comfort, but God knows how I came by it! Whereas the Christian, who receives any comfort, inward or outward, from God's hand, as a return of his patient waiting, hath none of these sad thoughts to scare him and break his draught when the cup is at his mouth. He knows where he had his outward estate and inward comfort; he can bring God to vouch for both, that they are with his leave and liking. There is a great difference between the joy of the husbandman, at the getting in of his corn in harvest, and the thief's joy, who hath stolen some sheaves out of another's field, and is making merry with his booty. Possibly you may hear a greater noise, and louder shouts of joy in the thief's house than the honest husbandman's, yet there is no comparison between them. An officer's knock at the thief's door, to search his house for stolen goods, spoils his mirth. Oh what fear and shame must then take hold on his guilty heart, who hears God coming to search for his stolen mercies and comforts. Secondly, The waiting soul hath enjoyment sanctified to him for his good, and this another wants with all he hath. And what is the blessing of mercy, but to have it to do us good? Hasty spirits grow worse by enjoyments gathered out of season. This is a sore evil indeed, to have wealth and comfort for our hurt. It was the sin of Israel, 'they waited not for his counsel,' Psa. cvi. 13. God had taken them as his charge, and undertook to provide for them if they would have stood to his allowance; but they could not stay his leisure, but 'lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert,' ver. 14. They must have what pleaseth their palate, and when their own impatient hearts call; and so they had: 'He gave them their request,' ver. 15; but they had better have been without their feast, for they did not thrive by it: 'He sent leanness into their souls,' ver. 15. A secret curse came with their enjoyments, which soon appeared in those great sins they were left to commit, ver. 16: 'They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord;' as also the heavy judgments by which God did testify against them for the same, Numb. xi. 31; whereas mercies that are received in God's way and time prove meat of better nourishment to the waiting soul: they do not break out into such blotches and plague-scores as these. As the other are fuel for lust, so these are food to the saints' graces, and make them more humble and holy: see this in Isa. xxx. 18, 19, compared with ver. 22, where they, as a fruit of their patient waiting on God for their outward deliverance, have with it that which is more worth than the deliverance itself, that is, grace to improve and use it holily. It was a great mercy that Hannah had, after her many prayers and long waiting, a son; but a greater that she had a heart to give up her son again to God, who gave him to her. To have estate, health, or any other enjoyment, upon waiting on God for the same, is mercy; but not to be

Digitized by Google

compared with that blessing which sanctifies the heart to use them for God's glory. And this is the ordinary portion of the waiting soul, and that not only in outward comforts, but inward also. The joy and inward peace which the sincere soul hath thus, makes it more humble, holy, heavenly; whereas the comfort which the hypocrite comes so quickly by either degenerates into pride and self-conceit, or empties itself into some other filthy sink, sometimes even of open profaneness itself, before it hath run far.

SECTION III.—Hope assures the soul, that while God stays the performance of one promise, he shall have the absence thereof supplied with the presence of another. And this is enough to quiet the heart of any that understands himself. God hath laid things in such a sweet method, that there is not one point of time wherein the soul of a believer is left wholly destitute of comfort, but there is one promise or other that stands ready to minister unto his present wants. Sometimes haply he may want what he strongly desires, yet even then care is taken for his present subsistence; one promise bears the Christian company while another comes. And what cause has the sick man to complain, though all his friends do not sit up with him together, if they take it by turns, and never leave him without a sufficient number? We read of a 'tree of life,' Rev. xxii. 2, which 'bears twelve manner of fruits, and yields her fruit every month,' so that it is never without some hanging on it. What can this tree be better conceived to be than Christ, who yields all manner of fruit in his promises, and comfort for all times, all conditions? The believer can never come, but he shall find some promise ripe, with which he may well stay his stomach, till the other hangs for farther ripening. Here you see the Christian hath provision for all the year. When Christ returned to heaven he gave his disciples this to comfort them, that he would come again, and carry them with him unto his Father, where now he lives himself in glory, John xiv. 2. This is sweet indeed; but, alas! what shall they do in the meantime to weather out those many storms which intervene between this promise and the time when it shall be performed? This, also, our Saviour considered, and tells them he does not mean to leave them comfortless, but gives them another promise to keep house with in the meantime, that is, a promise of his Spirit, who should be with them on earth, John xiv. 16, until he took them to be with him in heaven. The Christian is never at such a loss, wherein hope cannot relieve it, Jer. xvii. 7, 8: 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.' These waters are the promises, from which the believer draws continual matter of comfort; as a tree planted by the river flourisheth, however the year goes, so doth he, whatever God's exterior providence is. Possibly the Christian is in an afflicted state, and the promise for deliverance comes not; yet then hope can entertain him in the absence of that, at the cost of another promise, that though God doth not at present deliver him out of the affliction, yet he will support him under it, 1 Cor. x. 13. If yet the Christian cannot find this promise sufficient to discharge him of all impatience, distrust, and other sinful distempers (which, to his grief, he finds too busy in him, for all the promise), then hope hath another window to let out the smoke at; and that is, by presenting the soul with those promises which assure the weak Christian that pardoning mercy shall cover those defects which assisting grace did not fully conquer, Mal. iii. 17: 'I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. So Micah vii. 18: 'Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?' And certainly God would not have suffered so much impatience to have broken out in Job, but that he would have something left for pardoning mercy to do at the close of all, to which that holy man should see himself beholden, both for his deliverance, and that honourable testimony also which God himself gave of him before his uncharitable friends, who, from his great afflictions, and some discomposure of spirit in them, did so unmercifully burden him with the heavy charge of being an hypocrite.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRIAL OF WHAT METAL OUR HELMET OF HOPE IS MADE.

Let us ascertain whether we have this helmet of hope on our heads or not, —this helmet recommended to us in the text. As for such paltry ware as most are contented with, it deserves not the name of true hope, no more than a paper cap doth of a helmet. Oh! look to the metal and temper of your helmet in an especial manner; for at this most blows are made. He that seeks chiefly to defend his own head (the serpent, I mean,) will aim most to wound yours. None but fools and children are so credulous as to be blown up with great hopes upon slight ground. They who are wise, will be as wary how they place their hopes, especially for salvation, as a prudent pilot, that hath a rich lading, would be where he moors his ship, and casts his anchor. There is reason for our utmost care herein, because nothing exposeth men to more shame, than to meet with disappointment in their hopes, Job vi. 20: 'They were confounded, because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed;' that is, to miss of what they hoped to have found in those brooks. But there is no shame like that which a false hope for eternal salvation will put sinners to at last: some shall rise to shame everlasting, Dan. xii. 2. They shall awake out of their graves, and out of that fool's paradise also, wherein their vain hopes had entertained them all their lives; and see, instead of a heaven which they expected, hell to be in expectation of them, and gaping with full mouth for them. If the servants of Eglon were so ashamed after their waiting awhile at their prince's door, to find him and their hopes dead on the floor, Judges iii. 24, Oh! who can conceive what a mixture of shame and horror shall meet in their hearts at the great day, who shall see all their hopes for heaven fled, and leave them in the hands of tormenting devils to all eternity! Hannibal's soldiers did not so confidently divide the goldsmiths' shops in Rome among themselves, (which they never took,) as many presumptuous sinners promise themselves heaven's bliss and happiness, who must, instead thereof, sit down with shame in hell, except they can, before they die, shew better ground for their hope, than now they are able to do. Oh, what will these fond dreamers do in the day of the Lord's anger, when they shall see the whole world in a light flame around them, and hear God (whose piercing eyes will look them through and through) calling them forth before men and angels to the scrutiny! Will they then stand to their hope, and vouch it to the faith of Christ, which now they bless themselves so in? Surely their hearts will fail them for such an enterprise. None then will speak so ill of them as their own consciences. God will in that day use their own tongues to accuse them, and set forth the folly of their ridiculous hope to the confusion of their faces before all the world. The prophet foretells a time, when the false prophets 'shall be ashamed every one of his vision,—neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive; but he shall say, I am no prophet, I am a husbandman,' &c., Zech. xiii. 4, 5. Truly, the most notorious false prophet that the world hath, and deceives most, is this vain hope, which men take up for their salvation. He prophecies of peace, pardon, and heaven, to be the portion of such as never once entered into God's heart to make heirs thereof. But the day is coming, and it hastens, wherein this false prophet shall be confounded; when the hypocrite shall confess that he never had any hope for salvation, but the idol of his own fancy; and the formalist shall throw off the garment of his profession, by which he deceived himself and others, and appear to himself and all the world in his naked colours. It behoves, therefore, every one to be strict in the search of his own heart, to find what his hope is built on. Now hope of the right make is a rational, well-grounded hope; 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you,' 1 Peter iii. 15. Alas! how can they give an answer to others, that have not any to give to their own consciences? Why dost thou hope to be saved, O my soul? There is no Christian, be he never so weak in grace, but hath some reason founded on the Scriptures for the hope he professeth. Can you be so absurd as to think your own bold presumption, without any word of promise to build upon, can entitle your souls to the inheritance in God's kingdom? Should one come and say that your house and land were his, and shew no writing under your hand by which you did ever grant him

Digitized by Google

a right thereunto, but all he can say, is, he dreamed the last night that your house and land were his, and therefore now he demands it; would you not think the man insane, and had more right to a madhouse than to your estate? And yet there are many who hope to be saved, that can give no better reason for the same; and such are all grossly ignorant and profane sinners. As it is enough for a saint, to end the trouble which his fears put him into, to ask his soul why he is disquieted within him, and observe how little reason his heart can give for the same: so it would be sufficient to dismount the bold sinner from his lofty hope, if he could be prevailed upon to call himself to an account, and thus to accost his soul, and resolve not to stir without a satisfactory answer,—Tell me, O my soul, what reason findest thou in the whole Bible for thee to hope for salvation, who livest in ignorance of God, and sin against him? Certainly he would find his soul as mute as the man without the wedding garment was at Christ's question. This is the reason why men are such strangers to themselves, and dare not enter into any discourse upon this subject with their own hearts, because they know they shall soon make an uproar in their consciences, that would not be stilled in haste; they flatter their false hearts as much as David did Adonijah, who in all his life never displeased him so much as to ask him, Why dost thou so? nor they their souls to the day of their death, by asking them, Soul, why hopest thou so? Or if they have, it hath been as Pilate, who asked Christ, what was truth, John xviii. 38, but had no mind to stay for an answer. May be thou art an ignorant soul, who knowest neither who Christ is, nor what, in Christ, hope is to fasten its hold upon; but only with a blind surmise, thou hopest that God will be better to thee than to damn thee at last: but why thou dost thus hope, thou canst give no reason. If he will save thee, as now thou art, he must make a new gospel for thy sake; for this Bible damns thee without hope or help. The gospel is hid to them that perish, 2 Cor. iv. 3. But if knowledge will do it, thou haply canst shew good store of that; this is the breastwork under which thou liest, and keepest off those shots which are made at thee from the word, for those lusts thou livest and liest in, as a beast in his dung, defiling thyself with them daily. And is this all thou hast to prove thy hopes for salvation true? Indeed many make no better use of their knowledge of the Scriptures, than thieves do of the knowledge they have of the law of the land, who study it, not that they mean to keep it, but to make them more cunning to evade the charge of it. So many acquaint themselves with the word, especially those passages in it that display the mercy of God to sinners, that with these they may stuff a pillow to lay their wretched heads on, when the cry of their abominations, in which they live, begins to break their rest. God deliver you from such hope as this! Surely you mean to provide a better answer to give to Christ at the great day than this, why ye hope to be saved by him! Will thy knowledge, thinkest thou, be as strong a plea for salvation, as thy sins which thou wallowest in against that knowledge will be for thy damnation? If there be hope for such as thee, then come Judas and Jezebel, yea, devils, and all the infernal spirits, and strike in with this good company for a part with them, for some of you can plead more of this than any of them all. But may be thou hast more yet to say for thyself than this. Thou art not only improved in knowledge, but reformed also; the pollutions in which once thou layest, now thou hast escaped, yea, thy reformation is embellished and set forth with a very gaudy profession of religion, both of which have gained thee a very high opinion in the thoughts of all thy neighbours, so that if heaven might be carried by recommendation, thou couldst haply have a testimonial for thy unblameable and saint-like behaviour among them; yet let me tell thee, if thou meanest to be faithful to thy own soul, thou must not rest in their charitable opinion of thee; not judge of thy hopes for heaven by what comes under their cognizance: but look into thy own bosom, and inquire what spring thou canst find there to have been the cause of this change and new motion that hath appeared in thy external conversation. This alone must decide the controversy, and bring thy thoughts to an issue what to judge of thy hope. It is not a new face, that colours our outward behaviour, but a new principle, which changeth the frame of the heart within, will evince thy hope to be good and genuine. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope,' 1 Pet. i. 3. The new birth entitles to the new hope;

Digitized by Google

if the soul be dead the hope cannot be alive. And the soul may be dead, and yet put into a very handsome dress of external reformation and profession, as well as a dead body may be clad with rich clothes. A beggar's son, wearing the clothes of a rich man's child, may as well hope to be heir to the rich man's land, as thou by an external reformation and profession, to be God's heir in glory. The child's hopes are from his own father, not from a stranger: now while thou art in a natural state, old Adam is thy father; and what canst thou hope from him who proved worse than nought, and left his poor posterity nothing, except a crazy, mortal body, a sinful nature, and a fearful expectation of death, temporal and eternal, from the wrathful hand of a provoked God? Oh, how can you give way, that sleep should fall upon your eyes, till you enjoy this relation to God! Hannah was a woman of a bitter spirit, till she got a child from God; and hast not thou more reason to be so, till thou art a child of God? Better, a thousand times over that thou shouldst die childless, than fatherless; my meaning is, that thou shouldst leave no child to inherit thy estate on earth, than to have no Father to give the an inheritance in heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO DUTIES PRESSED UPON THOSE, WHO, UPON TRIAL, FIND THIS GRACE OF HOPE IN THEM.

For exhortation; and this either respects believers, who are furnished with this helmet; or unbelievers, who yet are without hope.

First, For you, believers, who, upon trial, are found to have this helmet of hope. Several duties are to be pressed upon you as such.

Section I.—First, be thankful for this unspeakable gift. I will not believe thou hast it, if thy heart be not abundantly let out in thankfulness for it. Blessed Peter cannot speak of this but in a doxology: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,—who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope,—to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' 1 Peter i. 3. The usual proem to Paul's epistles is of this strain, Col. i. 3; Eph. i. 3. Hast thou heaven in hope? It is more than if thou hadst the whole world in hand. The greatest monarch the earth hath will be glad, in a dying hour, to change his crown for thy helmet; his crown will not procure him this helmet, but thy helmet will bring thee to a crown; a crown, not of gold, but of glory, which, once on, shall never be taken off, as his is sure to be. O remember, Christian, what but a short time since thou wert; so far from having any hope of heaven, that thou wert under a fearful expectation of hell and damnation; and are those chains of guilt with which thy trembling conscience was weighed down unto despair, taken off, and thy head lifted up to look for such high preferment in the celestial court of that God, whose wrath thou hadst, by thy horrid treasons, most justly incensed against thee? Certainly, of all the men in the world, thou art deepest in debt to the mercy of God. If he will be thanked for a crust, he looks, surely, thou shouldst give him more for a crown. If food and raiment, though coarse and mean, be gratefully to be acknowledged; oh, with what ravishment of love and thankfulness are you to think and speak of those rarities and robes with which you hope to be fed and clad in his heavenly kingdom! Especially if you cast your eye aside, and behold those that were once your fellow-prisoners, in what a sad and dismal condition they continue in, while all this happiness is befallen you! It could not surely but affect his heart into admiration of his prince's mercy, and undeserved favour to him, who is saved from the gibbet only by his gracious pardon; if, as he is riding in a coach toward his prince's court, he should meet some of his fellow-traitors on sledges, as they are dragging, full of shame and horror, to execution, for the same treason in which he had as deep a hand as any of them. And dost not thou see, Christian, many of thy poor neighbours, with whom thou hast had a partnership in sin, pinioned with impenitency and unbelief, driving swiftly to hell and destruction; while thou, by the free, distinguishing mercy of God, art on thy way for heaven and glory? Oh, down on thy knees, and cry out, Lord, why wilt thou show thyself to me, and not to these? How easy had it been, and righteous, for God to have directed the pardon to them, and the warrant for damnation unto thee!

Digitized by Google

When thou hast spent thy own breath and spirits in praising God, thou hadst need beg a collection of praises of all thy friends who have a heart to contribute to such work, that they would help thee in paying this debt; yet all this (with what in heaven thou shalt disburse thyself to all eternity, in better coin than can be expected from thee here, where thy soul is embased with sinful mixtures), must be accounted rather an acknowledgment of what thou owest to thy God, than any payment of the debt.

Section II.—Live up to thy hopes, Christian; let there be a decorum kept between thy principles and thy practices,—thy hope of heaven, and walk on earth. The eye should direct the foot. Thou lookest for salvation; walk the same way thy eye looks. This being so often pressed in the word, shews both its necessity and difficulty. Sometimes, we are stirred up to act 'as becometh saints,' Rom. xvi. 2; Eph. v. 3. Sometimes, 'as becometh the gospel of Christ,' Phil. i. 27. Sometimes, as becometh those who profess godliness, 1 Tim. ii. 10. There is a decorum, which if a Christian doth not observe in his walking, he betrays his high calling and hopes unto scorn. To look high and to live low, how ridiculous it appears! When a man is dressed on purpose to be laughed at, and made a jeering stock, they put on him something of the king, and something of the beggar, that, by this patchwork of mock-majesty, he may appear the greater fool to all the company. And certainly, if the devil might have the dressing of a man, so as to cast the greater shame and ignominy upon him, yea, upon Christ and the profession of his gospel, he could not think of a readier way than to persuade a wretch to pretend to high and glorious hopes of heaven, and then to have nothing suitable to the high-flown hopes in his conversation, but all base and unworthy of such royal claims. If ye shall see one going into the field with a helmet of brass on his head, but a wooden sword in one hand, and a paper shield on the other, and the rest of his armour similar to these, you would expect he was not likely to hurt his enemies, except they should break their sides with laughing at him. Such a goodly spectacle is the vain professor, who lifts up his head on high, with a bold expectation of salvation, but cannot shew one grace to suit with the great hope he hath taken up; he may afford the devil sport, but never do him any great hurt, or himself good.

But, may be, you will ask, How is the Christian to live up to his hopes? I answer first, in general, he is to be careful to do nothing in which he may not freely exercise his hope, and from the promise expect that God will, for Christ's sake, both approve the action, and reward him for it. Ask thy soul this question seriously, before thou engagest in any work, May I hope that God will bid me good speed? Can I look for his countenance in it, and his blessing on it? It is very unworthy of a Christian to do anything, as if he were afraid God or his conscience should be privy to his work. Whatsoever is not of hope is sin, because it cannot be of faith. Oh how would this preserve the Christian heart in the right path! Possibly thou hast a grudge against thy neighbour; the fire is kindled in thy heart, though it flames not presently out into bitter words and angry behaviour, and thou art going to pray; ask now thy soul whether God will accept that sacrifice which is kindled with such strange fire; yea, bid thy soul bethink itself how thy hopes of pardoning and saving mercy from God can agree with thy wrathful, unforgiving spirit towards thy brother. Certainly, as the sun cannot well be seen through a disturbed air, neither can the eye of hope well see her object when the soul is tumultuous with anger.

CHAPTER X.

SEVERAL INSTANCES WHEREIN THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD COMPORT WITH AND LIVE UP TO HIS HOPES.

Section I.—In your company. Man is a sociable creature, made for fellowship. And what company is fit for thee to consort with but those of the same hopes with thyself? The saints are a distinct society from the world. 'Let ours learn to maintain good works,' Titus iii. 14. 'Ours,' that is, of our fellowship. And it becomes them to seek their company among themselves. That of Peter and John is observable, Acts iv. 23: 'Being let go, they went to

Digitized by Google

their own company.' When among the ungodly world, they made account they were not in their own company, and therefore stayed no longer than needs must among them. There were enough surely in the land of Canaan with whom Abraham might have associated; but he knew they were not company for him to be linked to in any intimacy; and therefore it is said of him, Heb. xi. 9, that he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. We find him, indeed, confederate with Mamre the Amorite, and Eschol and Aner, his brethren, Gen. xiv. 13, which presupposeth more than ordinary acquaintance. But these, in all probability, were proselytes, and had, by Abraham's godly persuasions, renounced their idolatry, to worship with him the true God; and we may the rather be induced to think so because we find them so deeply engaged with Abraham in battle against those idolatrous neighbouring princes, which, had they themselves been idolaters, it is likely they would not have done for a stranger, and him of a strange religion also. We find how dearly some of the saints have paid for their acquaintance with the wicked, as Jehoshaphet for his intimacy with Ahab; and if, knowing this, we shall yet associate ourselves with such, we cannot in reason look to pay less than they have done; yea, it will be well if we come off so cheap, because we have their follies recorded to make us wiser. O, consider, Christian, whither thou art going in thy hopes! Is it not to heaven? And do not men seek for such company as go their way? And are the wicked of thy way? When heaven's way and hell's meet in one road, then, and not till then, can that be. And if thy companion will not walk in heaven's way, what wilt thou do that walkest with him? It is to be feared thou must comply too much with him in his way. In a word, Christian, thy hope points to heaven; and is not one thing thou hopest for, when thou comest there, to be delivered from all company with the wicked? And what thou hopest for then, dost thou not now pray for? Whatever is the object of a saint's hope, is the subject of his prayer. As often as thou sayest 'Thy kingdom come,' thou prayest thus much: and will hoping and praying to be delivered from them stand with intimate familiarity with them?

SECTION II.—Then thou comportest with thy hopes of salvation when thou labourest to be as holy in thy conversation as thou art high in thy expectation. This the apostle urgeth from the condescendency of the thing, 2 Pet. iii. 11: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God?' Certainly, it becomes such to be holy, even to admiration, who look for such a blessed day: we hope then to be like the angels in glory, and therefore should, if possible, live now like angels in holiness. Every believing soul is Christ's spouse. The day of conversion is the day of espousals, wherein she is betrothed by faith to Christ, and, as such, lives in hopes for the marriage-day, when he shall come and fetch her home unto his Father's house, as Isaac did Rebecca to his mother's tent, there to cohabit with him, and live in his sweet embraces of love, world without end. Now, would the bride have the bridegroom find her in her sluttery and vile raiment? No, surely: 'Can a bride forget her attire?' Jer. ii. 32. Was it ever known that a bride forgot to have her wedding clothes made against the marriage-day, or to put them on when she looks for her bridegroom's coming? Holiness is the raiment of needlework in which, Christian, thou art to be brought unto thy king and husband, Psa. xlv. 14. Wherefore is the wedding-day put off so long, but because this garment is so long a making? When this is once wrought, and thou ready dressed, then that joyful day comes: 'The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready,' Rev. xix. 8. Thou hast not, Christian, a weightier argument to knock down all temptations to sin, nor a more honourable way to get the victory of them. I confess it is well when this enemy is worsted, what hand soever he falls by; though it be the fear of hell that keeps it down in the lives of men, it is better than not at all; yet I must tell you, that as the Israelites' state was poor and servile when they were fain to borrow the Philistines' grindstone to sharpen every man his axe and mattock, 1 Sam. xiii. 22, so it shows the Christian to be in no very good state, as to his spiritual affairs, when he is fain to use the wicked man's argument to keep him from sinning, and nothing will set an edge upon his spirit to cut through temptation but what the uncircumcised

Digitized by Google

world themselves use. Thou, Christian, art of a more noble spirit than these. And as we have a finer stone to sharpen a razor with than we use for a butcher's knife, so, certainly, a more spiritual argument would become thee better, to make thee keen and sharp against sin, than what prevails with the worst of men sometimes to forbear acting their wickedness. Go thou, Christian, to thy hope, and while the slavish sinner scares and terrifies himself from his lust with fire and brimstone, do thou shame thyself out of all acquaintance with it from the great and glorious things thou lookest for in heaven. Is it a sin of sensual pleasure that assaults thy castle? Say, then, to thy soul, Shall I play the beast on earth, that hope to be such a glorious creature in heaven? Shall that head be found now in a Delilah's lap, that ere long I hope will be laid in Abraham's bosom? Can I now yield to defile that body with lust and vomit, which is the garment my soul hopes to wear in heaven? O, no. Avaunt, Satan! I will have nothing to do with thee, or anything that will make me unmeet for that blessed place and holy state I wait for.

SECTION III.—Let thy hope of heaven moderate thy affections to earth. 'Be sober, and hope,' saith the apostle, 1 Pet. i. 13. You that look for so much in another world, may be very well content with a little in this. Nothing more unbecomes a heavenly hope than an earthly heart. You would think it an unseeming thing to see some rich man, that hath a vast estate, among the poor gleaners in harvest time, as busy to pick up the ears of corn that are left in the field, as the most miserable beggar in the company. Oh, how all the world would cry shame of such a sordid man! Well, Christian, be not angry if I tell thee that thou dost a more shameful thing by far, if thou, who pretendest to hope for heaven, be as eager in the pursuit of this world's trash as the poor carnal wretch is who expects no portion but what God hath left him to pick up in the field of this world. Certainly, thy hope is either false, or at best very little. The higher the summer sun mounts above the horizon, the more force it bears to clear and heat the air with his beams; and if thy hope of salvation were advanced to any ordinary height in thy soul, it would scatter these inordinate desires after this world, with which now thou art choked up, and put thee into a greater heat of affection after heaven. Augustine, relating what sweet discourse passed once between his mother and himself concerning the joys of heaven, breaks forth into this apostrophe, 'Lord, thou knowest how vile and contemptible this sorry world was in our eye in that day, when our hearts were warmed with some sweet discourse of that blessed place.' And I doubt not but every gracious persons finds the same: the nearer to heaven he gets in his hopes, the farther he goes from earth in his desires. When he stands upon these battlements of heaven, he can look down upon this dunghill world as a little dust-heap, next to nothing. It is Scultetus's observation, That though there are many blemishes by which the eminent saints and servants of God recorded in Scripture are set forth as instances of human frailty, yet not one godly man in all the Scripture is to be found whose story is blotted with the charge of covetousness. If that holds true, which I am not able to disprove, we may wonder how it comes about, that it should, now-a-days, be called the professors' sin, and become a common charge, laid by the profane upon those that pretend to heaven more than themselves. Oh, woe to those wretched men, who, by their scandalous practices of this kind, put the coal into wicked men's hands, with which they now black the names of all the godly, as if to be covetous were a necessary consequence of profession!

SECTION IV.—Let thy hope of heaven conquer thy fear of death. Why shouldst thou be afraid to die, who hopest to live by dying? Is the apprentice afraid of the day when his time will be out?—he that runs a race, of coming too soon to his goal?—the pilot troubled when he sees his harbour?—or the betrothed virgin grieved when the wedding-day approaches? Death is all this to thee? Thy indenture expires, and thy jubilee is come; thy race is run, and the crown won, and is sure to drop on thy head when thy soul goes out of thy body. Thy voyage, how troublesome soever it was in its sailing, is now happily finished, and death doth but this friendly office for thee, to uncover and open the ark of thy body, that it may safely land thy soul on the shore of eternity at thy heavenly Father's door, yea, in his sweet embraces, never to be put to sea more. In a word, thy husband is come for thee, and knocks with

Digitized by Google

death's hand at thy door, to come forth unto him, that he may perform his promise which, in the day of thy betrothing, he made to thee; and thou lovest him but little, if thou be not willing to be at the trouble of a removal hence, to enjoy his blissful presence in heaven, where such preparation is made for thy entertainment, that thou canst not know here, though an angel were sent on purpose to inform thee. Oh, what tongue can express that felicity, which infinite power makes ready! The Turks say, they do not think we Christians believe heaven to be such a glorious place as we profess and talk of; for, if we did, we would not be so afraid to go thither, as they see many, that profess themselves Christians, to be. It cannot be denied, but all inordinate fears of death betray great unbelief, and little hope. We do not look upon death under a right notion, and so we start at it, which, were we by faith but able to see through, and assure ourselves it comes to do us a good turn, we should feel as comfortably at the thoughts of it, as now we are scared at the apparition of it. The horse eats that hay in the rack, which he is afraid of when a little lies at a distance on the road; because there he knows it, but on the way he doth not. Christian, understand aright what message death brings to thee, and the fear of it will be over; it snatcheth thee, indeed, from this world's enjoyments, but it leads thee to the felicities of another, incomparably better. And who, at a feast, will chide the servant that takes away the first course, to make room for the second to be set on, that consists of far greater delicacies?

Section V.—Then thou comportest with thy hope, when thou livest in the joy of thy hope. A sad heart does not become a lively hope. Let him follow his master with a heavy countenance, that looks to get nothing by his service; thou art out of this fear, and therefore wrongest both thyself and thy God by thy disconsolate spirit, Heb. iii. 6: 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end.' Christ takes no more delight to dwell in a sad heart, than we in a dark house; therefore, let in the light which sheds its beams upon thee from the promise, or else thy sweet Saviour will be gone. We do not entertain our friends in a dark room, or sit by those that visit us mopish, lest they should think we are weary of their company. Christ brings such good news with him, as may bespeak better welcome with thee than a disconsolate spirit. Could such a message be carried to the damned, as might give them any hope of salvation, it would make hell itself a lightsome place, and tune those miserable souls into a rejoicing temper in the midst of their present torments. Blush, then, and be ashamed, O ye drooping saints, that a few thin clouds of short afflictions, coming over your heads, should so wrap you up in the darkness of your spirits, as that the hope of heaven, whither you look to come, should not be able in a moment to dispel and turn your sorrow into a ravishment of joy and comfort.

Section VI.—When with thy rejoicing of hope thou preservest an awful fear of God; 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy,' Psalm cxlvii. 11. We too often see, that children forget to pay that respect and reverence which is due to their parents, when once the estate is made sure unto them. And, truly, though the doctrine of assurance cannot be charged with any such bitter fruit to grow naturally from it, as Papists would make us believe, yet we are too prone to abuse it; yea the best of saints may, after they have the love of God, with eternal life, passed over to them under the privy seal of hope's assurance, be led so far into temptation, as to fall foully, and carry themselves very undutifully. Witness David and Solomon, whose saddest miscarriages were, after God had opened his very heart to them in such manifestations of love as few had the like; both are checked by God for this, and a blot left upon their history, on purpose to shew what a sad accent this gave to their sin, that they fell after such discoveries of Divine love made to them, and to leave us instances of human frailty, and that in the most eminent saints, such as were penmen of holy writ, that when our hope grows into greatest assurance, and this assurance spreads itself into highest rejoicing, from the certainty of our expected glory, we should yet nourish a holy fear of God in our hearts, lest we forget him in the abundance of our peace. This holy fear will be to our joy, as the continual dropping of water on the iron-work in the fuller's wheel, which keeps it from firing, or as the *pericaedium*, with which the God of nature hath moated about the heart in our bodies, that by the water

Digitized by Google

in it, the heart, which is perpetually in motion, might be kept from being inflamed into a distempered heat. The devil is pleased if he can, at any time, get a saint to sin: but he glories most, when he can lay them in the dirt, in their holiday clothes, and make them defile themselves when they have their garments of salvation on; I mean those which God hath in some more than ordinary discovery of himself clothed them withal. If at such a time he can be too hard for them, then he hath, he thinks, a fair occasion given him to go, and insultingly shew God what pickle his child is in, and hold up the Christian's assurance and comfort mockingly (as the patriarchs their brother's coat to their father), besmeared with blood and filth of some beastly sin he hath thrown him into, and ask God, Is this the assurance thou hast given him of heaven; and this the garment of salvation which thou didst put on him? See where he hath laid it. Oh, what gracious soul trembles not at the thought of putting such blasphemy into the mouth of the devil to reproach the living God with! That Christian is the beloved child, and shall be most made of by his heavenly Father, who sits not down to loiter in the sunshine of Divine love, but gathers up his feet the nimbler in the way of duty, because his God is so kind as to make his walk more cheerful and comfortable than others, and who loseth not his reverential fear of God, in God's familiarity with him. Moses, for instance; did ever the great God treat a mortal man, a saint in flesh, with the like familiarity and condescension, as he did that holy man, with whom he spake mouth to mouth, and before whom he caused all his goodness to pass? Exod. xxxiv. 6. And how bears he this transcending act of grace? Doth he grow bold, and forget the distance between God and him by this low stoop of the Divine Majesty, to converse with him in such a humble manner? No; his heart was never more filled with the reverence of God than now; he trembled, indeed, and quaked more (it is very likely) on Mount Sinai, but his filial fear was as conspicuous now as then. It is true, this extraordinary manifestation of those soul-ravishing attributes of God's love and goodness, especially his pardoning mercy to him that knew himself a sinner, and at that time made much more sensible thereof by the terror which the dreadful promulgation of the law had left on his spirit, could not but exceedingly heighten his joy, and overrun his soul with a sweet love to so gracious a God. Yet was not Moses's awful fear of God drowned in the high tide of these sweeter affections; verse 8, "And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.' This favourite of heaven, mark how he shews his fear of God most, when God expresseth his love to him most.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXHORTATION TO STRENGTHEN HOPE; PRESSED FROM THREE ARGUMENTS.

Labour, O ye saints, to strengthen your hope. There is a weak faith, so a wavering hope; this you are, by the diligent use of all means, to establish. Now, hope is firm and solid when the Christian doth not fluctuate, but by this anchor-hold, which hope hath on the promise, is kept from those dejections and tumultuous fears with which they that have no hope are swallowed up, and they whose hope is but weak are sadly discomposed and shaken; that is, a solid body which is compact, and free from heterogeneous mixtures. The more pure gold is from dross, and whatever is of a different nature to itself, the more solid it is: so hope, the more it is refined from groundless presumption on the one hand, or slavish fear and distrust on the other, the more solid and strong it is. This, in Scripture, is called, 'The assurance of hope.' Now, to provoke you to a holy zeal in your endeavour after this.

Section I.—Consider it is thy duty so to do. By the Papist's doctrine no man is bound to labour for such an assurance. But whether we should believe God or them, judge ye. What saith the Spirit? Heb. vi. 11: 'We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' Observe, first, the thing he exhorts to endeavour for,—'the full assurance of hope.' They whose hope is weak, sail but with a little side wind; the apostle would have them go before the wind, and be carried with a full gale to heaven, which is done when the soul, like a

Digitized by Google

sail spread to the wind, is so filled with the truth and goodness of the promise, that it swells into an assured hope of what is promised, and rejoiceth in a certain expectation of what it shall have when it comes to the shore of eternity, though it be now tossed and weather-beaten with a thousand temptations and trials in its passage. Secondly, Observe whom he presseth this duty upon; not some few choice Christians, as an enterprise laid out for them above the rest of their fellow-soldiers, but he lays it on every person that will prove himself a Christian,—'We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence,' &c. In our civil trade, and particular worldly calling, it were sinful for every poor man to propound such a vast estate to himself in his own desires, as he sees some few, the wealthiest merchants, have got by their trade, so as no less shall content him. But in the spiritual trade of a Christian it is very warrantable for every one to covet to be as rich in grace as the best. Paul will not think himself wronged if thou desirest to be as holy a man as he was, and labour after as strong a faith and stedfast a hope as he had; yea, thou oughtest not to content thyself with what thou hast, if there were but one degree of grace more to be had than what at present thou hast obtained. And, Thirdly, Observe what he imputes the weakness of the saints' grace to; not to an impossibility of attaining more, but their sloth and laziness; and therefore he opposeth this to that blessed frame of heart he so much wisheth them, ver. 12, 'that ye be not slothful.' Indeed, it is the diligent hand makes rich; as in this world's goods, so in this heavenly treasure also.

Section II.—Labour to strengthen thy hope of salvation, or thou wilt shew that thou little esteemest Christ and his salvation. As we prize any good, so we labour more or less to assure ourselves of it. If a prince should lose a pin from his sleeve, or a penny out of his purse, and one shall bring him news they are found, the things are so inconsiderable that he would not care whether it were true or not; but if his kingdom lay at stake in the field, and intelligence comes that his army hath got the day, and beaten the enemy, O how he would long to have his hope, that is now raised a little, confirmed more strongly by another post! Is heaven worth so little, that you can be satisfied with a few probabilities and uncertainties? Thou basely despisest that blessed place, if thou be no more solicitous to know the truth of thy title to it. When Micaiah seemed to give Ahab some hope of a victory, by bidding him go up and prosper, the thing being passionately desired by the king, he fears the worst, and therefore cannot rest till he knows more of this matter. 'And the king said unto him, How often shall I adjure thee that you tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?' 1 Kings xxii. 16. May be thou hast some loose, wavering hopes of heaven floating in thy soul; if now thou didst think thy eternal woe or weal lay in the truth or falsehood of that hope, certainly thou wouldst search thy heart by the word, and adjure thy conscience after an impartial review, to tell thee the naked truth what thy state is, and whether thou mayest in God's name, and with the leave of his word, hope it shall be thy portion or not; and this thou wouldst do, not hypocritically, as that wretched king did, (who adjured Micaiah to tell him the truth, and then would not believe him, though he did it faithfully,) but with great plainness of heart, it being about a business of no less importance than what shall become of thee to eternity. Peter, when surprised with the tidings of Christ's resurrection, though the report did not find such credit with him as it might; yet, by his speedy running to, and looking into the sepulchre, he shewed both how dearly he loved his Lord, as also how joyful a man he should be if the news were true that he was alive. Thus, Christian, though the promise of eternal life hath not hitherto produced such an assurance of hope, that thou art the person that shall undoubtedly enjoy it, yet shew what thoughts thou hast of that blissful state, by endeavouring to strengthen thy hope, and put thyself out of doubt thereof.

Section III.—Consider this also, in the last place, That thou knowest not what stress thy hope may be put to before thou diest. The wise mariner doth victual his ship for the longest day; he reckons on cross winds which may retard his voyage and make it more troublesome, knowing well it is easier carrying provision to sea, than getting it there. *Non facile inveniuntur in adversitate præsidia, quæ non fuerint in pace quæsita,*—a good speech of Austin. God himself tells us, 'we have need of patience,' (he means great store of patience),

Digitized by Google

'that after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promise,' Heb. x. 36. And if of patience, then of hope, because patience bears all on hope's back. Now, because we know not the certain degree of hope that will serve our turn, (God having purposely concealed the weight of affliction and temptation he intends to lay on us,) therefore we should never cease our endeavour to strengthen it. There are hard duties to be performed, and strong trials to be endured, and those require a hope proportionable. We are 'to hold fast the rejoicing of our hope unto the end,' Heb. iii. 6. Now, will the Christian of weak hope do this? He, alas! is like a leaky ship with a rich lading,—the fear of sinking before she gets the port takes away the owner's joy. Bid such an one rejoice in his inheritance that is laid up in heaven for him, and he will tell you he questions whether ever he shall come there. Patient waiting for mercy deferred is another hard duty: 'It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.' Now, weak hope is short breathed, and cannot stay long with any quietness. Weak persons are commonly hardest to please; soon peevish and froward, if they have not what they would when they desire it. When David's faith and hope were under a distemper, then he falls out with all. The prophet himself, that brought him the news of a kingdom, cannot escape his censure, and all because the promise stayed longer before it was delivered than he expected. 'I said in my haste, All men are liars,' Psalm cxvi. 11; whereas the promise went not a day beyond its due time, but he missed of its true reckoning through his inordinate desire; but take him when his faith and hope are strong, and he is not so hasty, but thinks his estate in God's hand as safe as if it were paid into his own; Psalm lxv. 1, 'Praise waiteth for thee, O Lord;' or, as the Hebrew may be rendered, 'Praise is silent for thee.' As if the holy man had said, Lord, I quietly wait for a time to praise thee; my soul is not in an uproar because thou stayest; I am not murmuring, but rather stringing my harp, and tuning my instrument with much patience and confidence, that I may be ready to strike up when the joyful news of my deliverance come. You have much ado to make the child quiet till dinner, though he sees preparations for a great feast; but one that is grown up will be soon pacified when he is kept a little longer than ordinary from his meal upon such an occasion. O Christian! it is our childishness and weakness of grace, especially of our hope, that makes us so soon out of patience to wait God's leisure: strengthen hope, and patience will grow with it. In a word, Christian, thou hast great trials and strong temptations to conquer before you enter the gates of heaven. Now defend thy hope, and that will defend thee in these; strengthen that, and that will carry thee through them. The head, every member is officious to preserve; the hands are lift up to keep off the blow, the feet run to carry it from danger, the mouth will receive any unsavoury pill to draw fumes and humours from it. Salvation is to the soul what the head is to the body, the principal thing it should labour to secure; and hope is to our salvation what the helmet is to the head. Now, if he be unwise that ventures his head under a weak helmet in the midst of bullets in time of battle, then much more unwise is he that hazards his salvation with a weak hope. Know, Christian, the issue of the battle depends on thy hope; if that fail, all is lost. Thy hope is in conflicts with temptations and sufferings, as a prince is amidst his army, who puts life into them all, while he looks on and encourageth them to the battle; but if a report of the king's being slain comes to their ears, their courage fails, and hearts faint; therefore Ahab would be held up in his chariot to conceal his danger from his people, the knowledge of which would have cast a damp on their courage. Thy hope is the mark Satan's arrows are levelled at; if possible keep that from wounds; or if at any time his dart reach it, and thy spirit begins to bleed of the wound which he hath given thee, by questioning whether such great sins can be pardoned as thou hast committed, such old festered sores as thy lusts have been can be ever cured, or afflictions so heavy, and which have continued so long, can possibly be either endured or removed, now labour to hold up thy hope though wounded in the chariot of the promise, and bow not by despairing, to let the devil trample on thy soul. So soon as thy hope gives up the ghost, will this cursed fiend stamp thee under his feet, and take his full revenge of thee, and that without any power of thy soul to strike a stroke for thy defence. This will so dispirit thee, that thou wilt be ready to throw up

Digitized by Google

all endeavour and attendance on the means of salvation; yea, desperately say, To what purpose is it to think of praying, hearing, and meditating when there is no hope? What! should we send for the physician when our friend is dead? What good will the chafing and rubbing the body do, when the head is severed from it? The army broke up, and every one was sent to his city, as soon as it was known that Ahab was dead. And so wilt thou cast off all thought of making any head against sin and Satan, when thy hope is gone, but fall either into Judas' horror of conscience, or with Cain, turn atheist, and bury the thoughts of thy desperate condition in a heap of worldly projects.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEREIN IS CONTAINED SIX DIRECTIONS HOW THE CHRISTIAN MAY GET HOPE STRENGTHENED.

SECTION I.—IF thou meanest thy hope of salvation should rise to any strength and solidity, study the word of God diligently. The Christian is bred by the word, and he must be fed by it, or his grace will die. That is the growing child that lies oftenest at the breast. Now, as God hath provided food in his word to nourish every grace, so he had a particular respect to the welfare and growth of the saint's hope, as one principal end of their writing; Rom. xv. 4: 'That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.' The devil knows this so well, that his great labour is spent to deprive the Christian of the help which the word is stored with; and, indeed, therein he is not mistaken; for so long as this river is unblocked up, which makes glad the city of God, and the Christian receives the succours which are brought on the stream of its precious promises, the devil can never besiege him round, nor put him to any great straits. Some, therefore, he deprives of their relief, by mere sloth and laziness; they make a few fruitless complaints of their doubts and fears, like sluggards complaining of their wants and poverty as they lie in bed, but are loth to rise, and take any pains to be relieved from them, by searching in the word for their satisfaction; and these sell their comfort the cheapest. Who will pity him though he should starve to death, who hath bread before him, but is loth to put his hand out of his bosom to carry it to his mouth? Others he abuseth by false applications of the word to their souls, partly through their weak understandings and troubled spirits, which discolour the truths of God, and misrepresent them to their judgments, whereby they come to be beaten with their own staff, even those promises which a skillful hand would knock down Satan's temptations with. The devil is a great student in divinity, and makes no other use of his Scripture knowledge than may serve his turn by sophistry to do the Christian a mischief, either by drawing him into sin, or into despair for sinning: like some wrangling barrister, who gets what skill he can in the law, merely to make him the more able to put honest men to trouble by his vexatious suit. Well, if Satan be so conversant in the word, as to weaken thy hope, what reason hast thou then to furnish thyself with a holy skill to maintain and defend it!

Now, in thy study of the word, propound these two ends, and closely pursue them. First, Labour to clear up to thy understanding from the word, what must be experienced by every soul that hath the grant and warrant from God to hope assuredly for life and salvation. Something is necessary to be found in all such, or else it were free for all, (be they what they will, and live how they list,) actually to lay claim to a right in heaven and salvation. If God had set no bounds to Sinai, and said nothing who should come up the mount, and who not, it had been no more presumption in any of the company to have gone up than in Moses; and, if God requires nothing in the person who is to hope, then heaven is a common for one as well as another to crowd into: then the beastly sinner may touch God's holy mount as well as the saint, and fear no stoning for his bold adventure. But this surely is too fulsome a doctrine for any judicious conscience to digest. Well, having satisfied thyself, that if ever thou hast true hope, thou must also have the requisites, inquire what they are. Now the word holds forth two sorts, according to the two different covenants. First, There is a covenant of nature, or law covenant, which God made with innocent

Digitized by Google

Adam; and the condition of this was, perfect obedience of the person that claimed happiness by it: this is not the condition now required; and he that stands groping at this door, in hope to enter into life by it, shall not only find it nailed up, and no entrance to be had, but also deprives himself of any benefit of that true door, which stands open, and by which all pass that get thither; Gal. v. 4: 'Whosoever of you is justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace.' You must therefore inquire what the other covenant is. It is a covenant of grace, as the other was of nature;—of reconciliation between God and man, as the other was a covenant to preserve those friends who had never fallen out. Now the requisites of this covenant are repentance and faith: see Luke xxiv. 47; John iii. 36; Acts ii. 38, v. 31, xx. 21; Gal. v. 5. Labour, therefore, to give a firm assent to the truth of these promises, and hold it as an inviolable principle, that whoever sincerely repents of his sins, and with a faith unfeigned receiveth Christ to be his Lord and Saviour, this is the person that hath the word and oath of a God, that cannot possibly lie, for the pardon of his sins, and salvation of his soul. What service a strong assent to this will do thee toward exerting thy hope, thou wilt by and by see: it is the very basis thereof; the weight of the Christian's whole building bears so much on this, that the Spirit of God, when he speaks in Scripture of evangelical truths and promises, on which poor sinners must build their hopes for salvation, he doth it with the greatest averment of any other truths, and usually adds some circumstance or other that may put us out of all doubt concerning the certainty of them. Isa. liii. 4: 'Surely he hath borne our griefs;' there is no question to be made of it; it was our potion that he drank, our debt he paid. What end could he have besides, in such great sufferings? Was it to give us a pattern of patience how we should suffer? This is true, for some of our fellow-saints have been admirable instances of this; but surely there was more than this,—He bare our sorrows, and was wounded for our transgressions. This, this was the great business, worthy of the Son of God's undertaking, which none of our fellow-saints could do for us. So, 1 Tim. i. 15, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the word to save sinners:' as if he had said, Fear no cheat or imposture here, it is as true as truth itself; for such is he that said it: if you believe not this, you are worse than a devil: he cannot shut this truth out of his conscience, though the most unwelcome that ever came to his knowledge. 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins:' 1 John i. 9. What can the poor penitent fear, when that attribute is become his friend, that first made God angry with him; yea, so fast a friend as to stand bound for the performance of the promise, which was so deeply engaged to execute the threatening on him? Heb. vi. 17: 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath.' What security could we have asked more of a deceitful man, than the faithful God of his own accord gives? The Romans did not give their magistrates oaths', supposing the dignity and honour of their persons and place were bond strong enough to make them true and righteous. Surely then God's word would have deserved credit, though it had not an oath to be its surety; yet God condescends to this, that he may sink the truth of what he saith deeper into our minds, and leave the print fairer and fuller in our assents to the same, when set on with the weight of asseverations and oaths. Secondly, Having found what are the requisites of the covenant, rest not satisfied, till thou findest these are wrought in thy own soul, and art able to say thou art this repenting and believing sinner. A strong hope results from the clear evidence it hath for both these. We read in scripture of a threefold assurance, First, An assurance of understanding; Col. ii. 2. Secondly, An assurance of faith; Heb. x. 22. Thirdly, An assurance of hope; Heb. vi. 11. And it is a good note which an acute Doctor hath upon them, (D.A. Tac. Sa. p. 126,)—That these three make up one practical syllogism, wherein 'knowledge' forms the proposition, 'faith' makes the assumption, and 'hope' draws the conclusion. I do, saith the Christian, assuredly know from the word, that the repenting, believing sinner shall be saved; my conscience also tells me, that I do unfeignedly repent and believe, therefore I do hope firmly that I shall, however unworthy, be saved. Now we know there can be no more in the conclusion, than there is in the premises: so that as the force is, which the Christian puts forth in his assent to

Digitized by Google

the truth of the promise, and the evidence is, which he hath, that the condition of the promise, namely, faith and repentance, is wrought in his soul, so will his hope be weak or strong. If his assent to the truth of the promise be weak, or his evidence for the truth of his faith and repentance be dark and uncertain, his hope, which is born, as I may say, of these, must needs partake of its parent's infirmities, and be itself weak and wavering.

SECTION II.—Wouldst thou have thy hope strong? Then keep thy conscience pure. Thou canst not defile one, without weakening the other. Living godly in this present world, and looking for the blessed hope laid up for us in the other, are both conjoined, Titus ii. 13. A soul wholly void of godliness, must needs be as destitute of all true hope; and the godly person that is loose and careless in his holy walking, will soon find his hope languishing. All sin disposeth the soul that tampers with it, to trembling fears, and shakings of heart: but such as are deliberately committed and plotted, they are to the Christian's hope, as poison to the spirits of his body, which presently drinks them up. They, in a manner, exanimate the Christian: they make the thoughts of God terrible to the soul, which, when he is in a holy frame, are his greater joy. 'I remembered God, and was troubled,' Psa. lxxvii. 3. They make him afraid to look on God in a duty, much more to look for God in the day of judgment. Can the servant be willing his master should come home, when he is in his riot and excess? Calvin, when some wished him to forbear some of his labours, especially his night studies, asked those friends, whether they would have his Lord find him idle when he came? O, God forbid, Christian, that death should find thee wanton and negligent in thy walking, that he should surprise thee lying in the puddle of some sin! O, how loth wouldst thou then be to die, and go to the great audit, where thou must give up thy accounts for eternity! Will thy hope then be in a proper state to carry thee up with joy to that solemn work? Can a bird fly, when one of its wings is broken? Faith and a good conscience are hope's two wings; if therefore, thou hast wounded thy conscience by any sin, renew thy repentance, that so thou mayest exercise faith for the pardon of it, and redeem thy hope, when the mortgage that is now upon it shall be taken off. If a Jew had pawned his bed-clothes, God provided mercifully that it should be restored before night: 'For,' saith he, 'that is his covering: wherein shall he sleep?' Exod. xxii. 27. Truly, hope is the saint's covering, wherein he wraps himself, when he lays his body down to sleep in the grave: 'My flesh,' saith David, 'shall rest in hope,' Psa. xvi. 9. O Christian, bestir thyself to redeem thy hope before this sun of thy temporal life goes down upon thee, or else thou art sure to lie down in sorrow. A sad going to the bed of the grave he hath, who hath no hope of a resurrection to life.

SECTION III.—Resort to God daily, and beg a stronger hope of him: that is the way the apostle took to help the saints to more of this precious grace, Rom. xv. 13: 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.' God, you see, is the God of hope; and not only of the first seed and habit, but of the abounding of it in us also. He doth not give a saint the first grace of conversation, and then leave the improvement of it wholly to his skill and care; as sometimes a child hath a stock at first to set up, and never hath more help from his father, but by his own good husbandry advanceth his little beginnings into a great estate at last: but rather as the corn in the field, which needs the influences of heaven to ripen it for harvest, as much as to quicken it in the clods when first thrown in; and therefore be sure thou humbly acknowledge God by constantly waiting on him for growth. The young lions are said to seek their meat from God, Psa. civ. 21; that is, God hath taught them, when hungry, to express their wants by crying and lifting up their voice, which, did they know God to be their maker, they would direct to him for supply: as we see the little babe that at first only expresseth its wants by crying, as soon as it knows the mother, directs its moan to her: thou knowest, Christian, that thou art at thy heavenly Father's finding. He knows, indeed, what thou wantest, but he stays his supplies till thou criest, and this will make him draw forth his breast presently. Doth God take care for beasts in the field? Surely then much more will he for thee his child, and for thy soul above all. Thou

Digitized by Google

mayest possibly pray for more riches, and be denied; but a prayer for more grace is sure to speed.

SECTION IV.—If you would strengthen your hope, labour to increase your love. There is a secret, yet powerful influence which love hath on hope. Moses greatly befriended the Israelite, when he slew the Egyptian that fought with him. Love kills slavish fear, one of the worst of enemies hope hath in the Christian's heart, and thereby strengthens hope's hand. He that plucks up the weeds, helps the corn to grow; and he that purges out the disease, makes way for nature's strengthening. It is slavish fear which oppresseth the Christian's spirit so that he cannot exercise his hope strongly, Now 'love casteth out fear,' 1 John iv. 18. The free woman will cast out the bond woman. Slavish fear is one of Hagar's breed, an affection which keeps all in bondage that have it; this love cannot brook. Shall I, saith the loving soul, fear that he will hurt me, or be hard to me, who loves me, and I him, so dearly? Away, unworthy thoughts! here is no room in my bosom for such company as you are. Love 'thinketh no evil,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5: that is, it neither wisheth evil to, nor suspects evil of another. The more thou lovest Christ, the less thou wilt be jealous of him; and the less jealous thou art of him, the more strongly wilt thou hope in him, and comfortably wait for him. Hence these two graces are so often meted in Scripture, 2 Thess. iii. 5: 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.' Love him, and you will wait for him. So Jude 21: 'Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.'

SECTION V.—Be much in the exercise of your hope. Repeated acts strengthen habits. Thus the little waddling child comes to go strongly by going often. You have no more money in your chest at the year's end than when you left it there; nay, it is well if rust or thieves have not made it less; but you have more by trading with it than your first stock amounted unto. 'Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury,' saith Christ to the slothful servant: Matt. xxv. 27. Now the promises are hope's object to act upon. A man can as well live without air, as faith and hope without a promise, yea, without frequent sucking in the refreshment of the promises; and therefore be much in meditation of them; set some time apart for the purpose. You that love your healths, do not content yourselves with the air that comes to you as you sit at work in your house, but you will walk out into the fields sometimes, to take the air more fresh: and if thou be a wise Christian, thou wilt not satisfy thyself with the short converse thou hast with the promises, as now and then they come into thy mind in thy calling, but will walk aside on purpose to enjoy a more fixed meditation of them. This were of admirable use, especially if the Christian hath skill to sort the promises, and lay aside the provision made in them suitable to his case in particular. Sometimes the Christian is at a stand when he remembers his past sins, and his hope is quite dashed out of countenance while they stare on his conscience. Now it were excellent for the Christian to pick out a promise, where he may see this objection answered, and hope triumphing over it. This was David's case, Psa. cxxx.: he grants himself to be in a most deplorable condition, if God should reckon with him strictly. 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' verse 3. But, verse 4, he puts his soul out of all fear of God's taking this course with poor penitent souls, by laying down this comfortable conclusion, as an indubitable truth: 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' that is, there is forgiveness in thy nature—thou carriest a pardoning heart in thy bosom: 'yea, there is forgiveness in thy promise; thy merciful heart doth not only incline thee to thoughts of forgiving, but thy faithful promise binds thee to draw forth the same unto all that humbly lay claim thereto. Now, this foundation laid' see what superstructure this holy man raiseth: verse 5, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope;' as if he had said, Lord, I take thee at thy word, and am resolved, by thy grace, to wait at this door of thy promise, never to stir thence till I have the forgiveness of my sins sent out unto me. And this is so sweet a morsel that he is loth to eat it alone, and therefore he sets down the dish, even to the lower end of the table, that

Digitized by Google

every godly person may taste with him: ver. 7, 8, 'Let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plentuous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his inquities;' as if he had said, That which is a ground of hope to me, notwithstanding the clamour of my sins, affords as solid and firm a bottom to any sincere soul in the world, did he but rightly understand himself, and the mind of God in his promise; yea, I have as strong a faith for such as for my own soul, and durst pledge the eternity of its happiness upon this principle, that God shall redeem every sincere Israelite from all his iniquities. This, this is the way to knock down our sins indeed, and Satan, when he comes to reproach us with them, and by their batteries to dismount our hope. Sometimes a qualm comes over the Christian's heart merely from the greatness of the things hoped for. What! saith the poor soul, seems it a small thing for me to hope that of an enemy I should become a son and heir to the great God? What, a rebel! and not only hope to be pardoned, but prove a favourite, yea, such an one as to have robes of glory in heaven, where I shall stand among those that minister about the throne of God in his heavenly court? O, it is too good news to prove true! Thus the poor soul stands amazed, as the disciples when the first tidings of the Lord's resurrection surprised them, and is ready to think its hope but an idle tale with which Satan deceived him, that he may presume to hope, and perish with his presumption.

Now, Christian, that thou mayest be able to step over this stumbling-block, be sure to observe those prints of God's greatness and infinitude that are stamped upon the promise: sometimes you have them expressed, on purpose to ease our hearts of this scruple. When God promised what great things he would do for Abraham, to make them more credible, he adds, 'I am the Almighty God,' Gen. xvii. 1; so Isaiah lv. 7: 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' But how can this possibly be done, that in the turn of a hand, as it were, such a great favour can be obtained, which among men could hardly be done in a lifetime? O, that is easily answered. He tells you he is not a sorry man, but a God, and hath a way by himself in pardoning wrongs, which none can follow him in; for it is as far above our ways as the heavens are above the earth. This, Christian, observe, and it will be a key to unlock all promises, and let you in to the untold treasures which are in them, yea, make the greatest promise in the Bible easy to be believed. Whenever you read any promise, remember whose bond it is,—the word of no other than God; and when you think on God, be sure you do not confine him within the little compass of your finite apprehensions, but conceive of him always as an infinite being, whose centre is everywhere, and circumference nowhere. When you have raised your thoughts to the highest, then know you are as far, yea, infinitely farther from reaching his glory and immensity than a man is from touching the body of the sun with his hand, when got upon a mountain. This is to ascribe greatness to God, as we are commanded, Deut. xxxii. 3; and it will admirably facilitate the work of believing. Suppose a poor cripple should be sent for by a prince to court, with a promise to adopt him for his son, and make him heir to his crown; this might well seem incredible to the poor man, when he considers what a leap it is from his beggar's cottage to the state of a prince. No doubt, if the promise had been to prefer him to a place in a hospital, or some ordinary pension for his maintenance, it would be easier credited, as more proportionable to his low condition; yet the greatness of the prince, and the delight that such take to be like God himself, by showing a kind of creating power to raise some, as it were, from nothing unto the highest honour a subject is capable of, thereby to oblige them, as their creatures, to their service; this might help such a one to think this strange accident not altogether impossible. Thus, should a poor soul spend all his thoughts on his own unmeetness and unworthiness to have heaven and eternal life conferred on him, it were not possible he should ever think so well of himself as that he should be one of those glorious creatures that were to enjoy it; but when the greatness of God is believed and the infinite pleasure he takes to demonstrate that greatness by making miserable creatures happy, rather than by perpetuating their miseries in an eternal state of damnation, and what cost he hath been at to clear a way for his mercy freely to act in; and, in a word,

Digitized by Google

what a glorious name this will gain him in the thoughts of those he thus exalts; these things, (which are all to be found in the word of promise,) well weighed and acknowledged, cannot but open the heart, though shut with a thousand bolts, to entertain the promise, and believe all is truth that God saith. You see how the promises may be suited to answer the particular objections raised against our hope; it were easy to multiply instances, and to shew any other case with promises for the purpose; but this will be most effectually done by you, who know your own scruples better than any other; and be such true friends to your own souls as to take a little pains therein. The labour in gathering a few herbs in the field, and making them up into a medicine by the direction of the physician, is very well repaid, if the poor man finds it restores him to health.

SECTION VI.—Preserve thy experiences of past mercies, and thy hope will grow stronger for the future. 'Experience worketh hope,' Rom. v. 4. He is the best Christian who keeps the history of God's gracious dealings with him most carefully, so that he may read it in his past experiences, when at any time his thoughts trouble him, and his spiritual rest is broken with distracting fears for the future. This is he who will pass the night of affliction and temptation with comfort and hope, while others that have taken no care to retain in their memories the remarkable instances of God's love and favour to them in the course of their lives, will find the want of this sweet companion in their sorrowful hours, and be put to sad distress; yea, it will be well if they be not driven to think their case desperate and past all hope. Sometimes a little writing is found in a man's study that helps to save his estate, for want of which he had gone to prison: and some one experience remembered keeps the soul from despair, a prison which the devil longs to have the Christian in: 'This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope,' Lam. iii. 21. David was famous for his hope, and not less eminent for his care to observe and preserve the experiences he had of God's goodness. He was able to recount the dealings of God to him; they were so often the subject of his meditation and matter of his discourse, that he had made them familiar to him. When his hope is at a loss he doth but exercise his memory a little, and he recovers himself presently, and chides himself for his weakness. 'I said, This is my infirmity, but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High, Psa. lxxvii. 10. The hound, when he hath lost the scent, hunts backward, and so recovers it and pursues his game with louder cry than ever. Thus, Christian, when thy hope is at a loss, and thou questionest thy salvation in another world, then look backward and see what God hath already done for thee. Some promises have their day of payment here, and others we must stay to receive in heaven. Now the payment which God makes of some promises here, is an earnest given to our faith that the other also shall be faithfully discharged when their date expires; as every judgment inflicted here on the wicked is sent as a pledge of that wrath the full sum whereof God will make up in hell. Go, therefore, Christian, and look over thy receipts. God hath promised, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you,' Rom. vi. 14. It is the present state of a saint in this life which is intended there. Canst thou find this promise made good to thee? Is the power of sin broke, and the sceptre wrung out of this king's hand, whom once thou as willingly obeyed as ever a subject obeyed his prince? Yea, canst thou find that he hath but begun to fall by thy dethroning him in thy heart and affections? Dost thou now look on sin, not as thou wert wont, as thy prince, but as an usurper, whose tyrany, by the grace of God thou art resolved to shake off, both as intolerable to thee and dishonourable to God, whom now thou acknowledgest to be thy rightful Lord, and to whose holy laws thy heart most freely promiseth obedience? This, poor soul, may assure thee that thou shalt have a full dominion over sin in heaven, which hath begun already to lose his power over thee on earth. It is observable how David rears up his hope to expect heaven's perfect state of holiness, from his sanctification begun on earth. First, He declares his holy resolution for God, and then his high expectation from God: Psa. xvii. 15, 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.' Hast thou found God's supporting hand in all thy temptations and troubles, whereby thou art kept from sinking under them? David would feed his hope for eternal salvation with this; Psa. lxxiii. 23: 'Thou hast holden me up by my

Digitized by Google

right hand;' now observe hope's inference, ver. 24,—'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.' And as experiences carefully kept and wisely improved, would conduce much to the strengthening the Christian's hope of salvation; so also would they lift up his head above all those distracting fears which arise in the Christian's heart, and put him to much trouble, from those cross and afflicting providences that befall him in this life. Certainly David would have been more scared with the big looks and vain deportment of that proud Goliath, had not the remembrance of the bear and the lion, which he slew, brought relief to him, and kept his fears down. But he had slain this uncircised Philistine in a figure, when he tore in pieces those unclean beasts; and, therefore, when he marches to him, this is the shield which he lifts up to cover himself with, 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine,' 1 Sam. xvii. 37. If experiences were no ground for hope in future straits, then they would not have the force of an argument in prayer; but saints use their experiences, and make account they urge God very close and home, when they humbly tell him what he hath already done for them, and expect he should therefore go on in his fatherly care over them,—'Save me from the lion's mouth, for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns,' Psa. xxii. 21. And, no doubt, a gracious soul may pray in faith from his past experience, and expect a satisfactory answer to that prayer, wherein former mercies are his plea for what he wants at present. God himself intends his people more comfort from every mercy he gives them, than the mercy itself, abstractedly considered, amounts to. Suppose, Christian, thou hast been sick, and God hath at thy humble prayer plucked thee out of the jaws of death; the comfort of this particular mercy is the least God means thee therein; for he would have thee make it a help to thy faith, and a shore to thy hope, when shaken by any future strait whatever,—'Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness,' Psa. lxxiv. 14. God, in that mercy at the Red Sea, is thinking what Israel should have to live on for forty years together; and intends that they should not only feast themselves at present with the joy of this stupendous mercy, but ponder it up in their memories, that their faith might not want a meal in the wilderness all the while they were to be in it. Experiences are like a cold dish reserved at a feast; sometimes the saint sits down with nothing else on his table but the promise and his experience; and he that cannot make a soul-refreshing meal with these, deserves to fast. Be sure, Christian, thou observest this in every mercy,—what is a matter of present thankfulness, and what is a ground of future hope. Achor is called 'a door of hope;' Hosea ii. 15. God, when he gives one mercy, opens a door, for him to give, and us to expect more mercy through it. God compares his promise to the rain which maketh the earth 'bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater;' Isa. lv. 10. Why shouldst thou content thyself with half the benefit of mercy? When God performs his promise, and delivers thee out of this trouble, and that strait, thou art exceedingly comforted, and thy heart possibly enlarged into thankfulness for the same. It is well; here is 'bread for the eater,' something that at present feasts thee. But where is 'the seed for the sower?' The husbandman doth not sell all his corn that he reaps, but saves some for seed, which may bring him another crop: so, Christian, thou shouldst not only feast thyself with the joy of thy mercy, but save the remembrance of it as hope-seed, to strengthen thee to wait on God for another mercy, and farther help in a needful time.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OBJECTION ANSWERED; WITH TWO OR THREE REFLECTIONS USEFUL FOR OUR IMPROVING EXPERIENCE.

But you will possibly say, How can a saint's past experience be so helpful to his hope for the future, when God, we see, often crosseth the saint's experiences? He delivers them out of one sickness, and takes them away, may be, with the next; he saves them in one battle without a scratch, and in another awhile after, they are killed or wounded; how then can a saint ground his hope from a past deliverance, to expect deliverance in the like strait again?

Digitized by Google

First, There is the same power still in God, that was then; what he did once for thee, he can with as much ease do again; and this is one way thy experiences may help thee. Thou hast seen God make bare his arm, so that except thou thinkest that he since hath lost the strength or use of it, and is become at last a God with a lame hand, hope hath an object to act upon, and such an one as will lift thy head above water.' Indeed, the soul never drowns in despair, till it hath lost its hold on the power of God; when it questions whether God will deliver, this is a sad leak, and will let in a thousand fears into the soul; yet so long as the Christian can use this pump, I mean exercise his faith on the power of God, and believe that God can deliver when he pleases, though it will not clear the ship of his soul of all its fears, yet it will keep it from quite sinking, because it will preserve him in a seeking posture. 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,' Mark i. 40; and for thee to say, God cannot deliver, who hast been an eye-witness to what he hath done, were not only to betray thy great unbelief, but to forfeit thy reason also. But, to give a more close answer to the question. The saint, from his former experiences even of temporal salvation, may, yea, ought not only believe that God can, but also that he will save him in all future straits and dangers of this nature; only, he cannot conclude that he will do it in the same way as in former deliverances. And none, I hope, will say, if he hath deliverance, that his experiences are crossed, because God doth use another method in the conveyance of it to them. A debt may be fully satisfied, as with money, so with that which is money's worth, except the bond restrains the payment otherwise. Now, there is no clause to be found in any promise for temporal mercies, that binds God to give them in specie, or in kind. Spiritual mercies, such I mean as are saving and essential to the saint's happiness, these, indeed, are promised to be given in kind, because there is nothing equivalent that can be given in lieu of them; but temporal mercies are of such an inferior nature, that a compensation and recompence may be easily given in their stead: yea, God never denies these to a saint, but for abundant advantage. Who will say the poor saint is a loser, whose purse God denieth to fill with gold, but filleth his heart with contentment? Or the sick saint, when God saves him, not by restoring to former health, but by translating him to heaven?

I shall wind up this head with two or three reflections to be used by the Christian, for his better improving past experiences when he is in distress. First, Look back to thy past experiences, and inquire whether thou canst not find that thy God hath done greater matters for thee, than this which thou now hast so many disquieting fears and despairing thoughts about. I will suppose thy present strait great; but wert thou never in a greater, and yet God did at last set thy feet free? Thou art now in a sad and mournful posture, but hath not he brightened a darker cloud than this, and led thee out of it into a state of light and joy? Surely, thy staggering hope may prevent a fall by catching hold of this experience. Art thou not ashamed to give thyself up for lost, and think of nothing but drowning in a less storm than that out of which God hath formerly brought thee safe to land? See David relieving his hope by recognising such an experiment as this; 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt not thou keep my feet from falling?' Psa. lvi. 13. Hast thou given me the greater, and wilt thou not the less? Perhaps thy present fear is apostasy; it runs in thy thoughts, that thou shalt one day fall by the hand of thy sins, and thou canst not be persuaded otherwise. Now it is a fit time to recall the day of God's converting grace. Darest thou deny such a work to have passed upon thee? If not, why then shouldst thou despair of perseverance? That was the day wherein he saved thy soul; 'This day,' saith Christ to Zaccheus, 'is salvation come to thy house,' Luke xix. 9. And did God save the soul by converting grace, and will he not keep thy feet from falling, by his sustaining grace? Was it not both more mercy and power to take thee out of the power of sin and Satan, than it will cost him to preserve thee from falling into their hands again? Surely, the Israelites would not so often have feared provision in the wilderness, had they remembered with what a high hand God did bring them out of Egypt. But may be, it is some outward affliction that distresseth thee: is it greater than the church's was, in cruel bondage and captivity? yet she had something of

Digitized by Google

recall, that put a new life into her hope,—'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope,' Lam. iii. 24. See the soul makes a spiritual mercy, because incomparably greater of the two, a ground of hope for temporal salvation, which is less. And hast not thou chosen him for thy portion? Dost thou not look for a heaven, to enjoy him in for ever? And can any dungeon of outward affliction be so dark, that this hope will not enlighten? Recall thy experience of his love to thy soul, and thou canst not be out of hope for thy body and outward condition. He that hath laid up a portion in heaven for thee, will lay out surely all the expenses thou needest in thy way thither. Secondly, Remember how often God hath confuted thy fears, and proved thy unbelief a false prophet. Hath he not knocked at thy door with inward comfort and outward deliverance, when thou hadst put out the candle of hope, given over looking for him, and been ready to lay thyself down on the bed of despair? Thus he came to Hezekiah, after he had peremptorily concluded his case desperate Isa. xxxviii. 10, 11; thus to the disciples in their unbelief,—'We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel,' Luke xxiv. 21. They speak as if now they were in doubt whether they should own their own former faith or no. Hath it not been thus with thee? Wert thou never at so sad a pass, the storm of thy fears so great that the anchor of hope even came home, and left thee to feed with misgiving and despairing thoughts, as if now thy everlasting night were come, and no morning supply more expected by thee? Yet even then thy God proved them all liars, by an unlooked-for surprise of mercy, with which he stole sweetly in upon thee. If so, press and urge this experience home upon thyself to encourage thy hope in all future temptations. What, O my soul! (thou shouldst say) wilt thou again be scared with these false alarms? Again, wilt thou lend an ear to thy distrustful, desponding thoughts, which so often thou hast found liars, rather than believe the report of the promise, which never put thy hope to shame, as these have done? The saints are often feeding their hopes on the carcase of their slain fears. The time which God chose, and the instrument he used to give the captive Jews their jail-delivery and liberty to return home, were so incredible to them, who now looked rather to be ground in pieces by those two mill-stones, the Babylonian within, and the Persian without the city, that when it came to pass, like Peter, whom the angel had carried out of prison, Acts xii., it was some time before they could come to themselves and resolve whether it was a real truth, or but a pleasing dream, Psalm cxxvi. 1. Now see what effect this strange disappointment of their fears had upon their hope. It sends them to the throne of grace for the accomplishment of what was so marvellously begun; ver. 3, 4: 'The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord.' They have got hold, by this experiment, of his power and mercy, and they will not now let him go till they have more; yea, their hope is raised to such a pitch of confidence, that they draw a general conclusion from this particular experience for the comfort of themselves, or others in any future distress,—'They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy; he that goeth forth and weepeth, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him,' verse 6. Thirdly, Remember what sinful distempers have broke out in thy afflictions and temptations, and how God hath, notwithstanding these, carried on a work of deliverance for thee. So that thou mayest say, in respect of these enemies in thy bosom, what David spake triumphantly in regard of his enemies without, that 'God hath prepared a table for thee in the presence of thy enemies,' yea, of his enemies. While thy corruptions have been stirring and acting against him, his mercy hath been active for thy deliverance. O what a cordial draught would this be to thy fainting hope! That which often sinks the Christian's heart in any distress inward or outward, and even weighs down his head of hope so that he cannot look up to God for help and succour at such a time, is the sense of those sinful infirmities which then discover themselves in him. How, saith the poor soul, can I expect that God should raise me out of this sickness, wherein I have betrayed so much impatience and frowardness? Or out of that temptation, in which I have exercised so little faith, and discovered so much unbelief? Surely I must behave myself better, before any good news be sent from heaven to me. It is well, that thou art so sensible of thy sins as to be thy own accuser, and prevent

Digitized by Google

Satan's doing it for thee; yet be not oppressed into discouragement by them. Remember how God hath answered the like objections formerly, and saved thee notwithstanding; if these could have hardened his bowels against thee, hadst thou been alive, yea, out of hell at this day? Didst thou ever receive a mercy of which God might not have made stoppage upon this very account that makes thee now fear he will not help thee? Or, if thou hast not an experience of thy own at hand, which were strange, then borrow one of other saints; David is an instance, beyond exception. This very circumstance with which his deliverance was enamelled, did above all affect his heart: 'I said in my haste, all men are liars; what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?' Psa. cxvi. 11, 12. He remembered his sinful and distempered carriage; this he mentions, to take shame for the same, and to wind up his heart to the highest pitch of thankfulness: he knows not how to praise God enough for that mercy which found him giving the lie to God's messenger, even Samuel himself, who was sent to tell him what was coming. And he doth not only make this circumstance an incentive to praise for what is past; but lays it down as a ground of hope for the future; Psalm xxxi. 22: 'I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless, thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee.' As if he had said, When I prayed with so little faith, that I, as it were, unprayed my own prayer, by concluding my case in a manner desperate; yet God pardoned my hasty spirit, and gave me that mercy which I had hardly any faith to expect: and what use doth he make of this experience, but to raise every saint's hope in a time of need? 'Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord,' ver. 24.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXHORTATION TO THEM THAT WANT THIS HELMET OF HOPE.

Be you exhorted, who are yet without this helmet, to provide yourselves with it. Certainly, if you be in your right mind, it is the first thing you will go about, and that with earnestness, especially if but three considerations take place in your thoughts.

Section I.—How deplorable a thing it is to be in a hopeless state! The apostle, Ephes. ii. 12, makes him to be without God that is without hope,—having no hope, and being without God in the world. God to the soul is what the soul is to the body: if that be so vile and noisome a thing, when it hath lost the soul that keeps it sweet, what is thy soul, when nothing of God is in it? 'The heart of the wicked is little worth,' saith Solomon, and why, but because it hath not God to put a value on it? If God, who is light, be not in thy understanding, thou art blind; and what is an eye whose sight is out fit for, but to help thee to break thy neck? If God be not in thy conscience to pacify and comfort it, thou must needs be full of horror or void of sense; a raging devil, or a stupid atheist: if God be not in thy heart and affections to purify them, thou art but a sink of sin: if God be not in thee, the devil is, for man's heart is a house that cannot stand empty; in a word thou canst not well be without this hope, neither in life nor death: not in life, for what comfort canst thou take in this life, without the hope of a better? A sad legacy it is which shuts the rebellious child, from all claim to the inheritance. Thou hast an estate, it may be, but it is all you must look for: and is it not a dagger at the heart of thy joy, to think thy portion is paid thee here, which will be spent by that time the saint comes to receive his? Much less tolerable is it to be without this hope in a dying hour. Who can, without horror, think of leaving this world, though full of sorrows, who hopes for no ease in the other? The condemned malefactor, as ill as he likes his smoky hole in the prison, had rather be there, than accept of deliverance at the hangman's hand; he had rather live still in his loathsome dungeon, than exchange it for a gibbet. And greater reason hath the hopeless soul (if he understands himself) to wish he may spend his eternity on earth, though in the poorest hole in it, and that under the most exquisite torment, than to be eased of pain here, and receive hell's torment hereafter. Hence is the sad confusion in the thoughts of guilty wretches, when their souls are summoned out of their bodies: this makes the very pangs of death stronger

Digitized by Google

than they would be, if these dear friends had but a hopeful parting. If the shriek and mournful outcry of some friends in the room of a dying man may so disturb him as to make his passage more terrible, how much more then must the horror of the sinner's own conscience, under the apprehensions of that hell whither it is going, amaze and affright him! There is a great difference between a wife's parting with her husband, when called from her to live at court under the shine of his prince's favour, whose return after a while she expects with an accumulation of wealth and honour, and another, whose husband is taken out of her arms to be dragged to prison and torment. Is this thy case? and art thou cutting thy short life out into chips, and spending thy little time upon trifles, when the salvation of thy soul is yet to be wrought out? Art thou trimming thy slimy carcase, while thy soul is dropping into hell? What is this but to be painting the door when the house is on fire! It was an unseasonable time for Belshazzar to be feasting and quaffing when his kingdom lay at stake, and an enemy at the gates. It would have become a wise prince to have been rather fighting on the wall, than feasting in his palace, and fattening himself for his own slaughter, which soon befell him, Dan. v. 30. And it would become thee better to call upon thy God, poor sinner, and lie in tears for thy sins at his foot, if yet haply thy pardon may be obtained, than, by wallowing in thy sensual pleasure, to stupify thy conscience, and lay it asleep, by which thou canst only gain a little ease from the troublesome thoughts of thy approaching misery.

Section II.—Consider, it is possible that thou, who art now without hope, may, by a timely and vigorous use of the means, obtain a hope of salvation; and certainly a possible hope carries in it a force of a strong argument to endeavour for an actual hope. There is not a devil in hell so bad, but, if he had a thousand worlds at his disposal (and every one better than this, which we so dote on), would change them all for such a hope. It was but a possibility which brought that heathen king of Nineveh from his throne to lie grovelling at God's foot in sackcloth and ashes; and that king will rise up in judgment against thee, if thou dost not more; for that was a possibility more remote than thine is: it took place, not from any express promise that dropped from the preacher to encourage them to humble themselves, and turn to the Lord, for we read of nothing but desolation denounced: but from that natural theology which was imprinted on their minds: this taught them to hope that he who is the chief good would not be implacable. But you have many express promises from God's faithful lip, that if you, in his time and way, seek him, as sure as he is now in heaven, you shall live there with him in glory,—'Your heart shall live that seek God,' Psa. lxix. 32. Yea, there are millions of blessed ones now in heaven experiencing the truth of this, who once had no more hope of heaven than yourselves now have; and that blissful place is not yet crowded so full, but he can and will make room for you, if you have a mind to go thither. There is one prayer which Christ made on earth, that will keep heaven's gate open for all that believe on him unto the end of the world,—John xvii. 20: 'Neither pray I for these, but for them that shall believe on me through their word.' This is good news indeed. Methinks it should make your souls leap within your breast, while you sit under the invitations of the gospel, as the babe once did in Elizabeth's womb, upon the Virgin Mary's salutation. Say not then, sinners, that ministers put you upon impossibilities, and bid you climb a hill inaccessible. No, it is the devil, and thy own unbelieving heart, who together conspire thy ruin, and tell thee so. And as long as you listen to these counsellors you are likely to do well, are you not? Well, whatever they say, know, sinner, that if at last thou missest heaven, which, God forbid! the Lord can wash his hands over your head, and clear himself of your blood: thy damnation will be laid at thine own door: it will then appear there was no cheat in the promise, no sophistry in the gospel, but thou didst voluntarily put eternal life from thee, whatever thy lying lips uttered to the contrary: 'My people would have none of me,' Psa. lxxxi. 11. So that, when the jury shall sit on thy murdered soul, to inquire how thou camest to thy miserable end, thou wilt be found guilty of thy own damnation. No one loseth God, but he that is willing to part with him.

Now, Thirdly, consider the horrid cruelty of this act, by thy incorrigible and impenitent heart, to pull down eternal destruction on thy own head. O what

Digitized by Google

a sad epitaph is this to be on a man's grave-stone,—'Here lies one that cut his own throat,'—this is the man that would not be reclaimed! He saw hell before him, and yet would leap into it, notwithstanding the entreaties of Christ, by his Spirit and ministers to the contrary.' And the oftener thou hast attempted to do it, and God hath been staying thy hand by his gracious solicitations, the greater will be thy shame and confusion before God, men, and angels, at the last day. God hath set a brand upon those acts of cruelty, which a man commits upon himself, above all others. It would show a man to be of a harsh, currish nature, that could see his horse in his stable, or hog in his sty, starve, when he hath meat to lay before him; more cruel still to hear his servant cry out for bread, and denied it; yet more horrid if this were done to a child or wife; but of all (because nature cries loudest for self-preservation) the greatest violence that can possibly be done to the law of nature, is to forget the duty we owe to our own life. What is it then for a sinner to starve his soul by rejecting Christ, the bread of life, and to let out his soul's blood at this wide sluice! This is a matchless cruelty! Indeed, that which makes the self-murder of the body so great a crime is, because it doth so imminently hazard the destruction of the soul. O how unworthy then art thou to have so noble a guest as thy soul dwelling in thy bosom, who preparest no better lodging than hell for it in another world! —that soul whose nature makes it capable of being preferred to the blissful presence of God in heaven's glory, if thou hadst not bolted the door against thyself by thy impenitency. But, alas! this, which is the worst murder, is most common. They are but a few monsters, that we now and then hear of, who lay violent hands upon their bodies, at the report of which the whole country trembles; but you can hardly go into any house in which you shall not find some attempting to make away with their souls; yea, that carry the very knife in their bosoms (their beloved sins, I mean, with which they stab them: even those that are full of natural affections to their bodies, so as to be willing to spend all that they are worth, with her in the gospel, on physicians when the life of it is in danger, yet so cruel to their undying souls, that they turn Christ, their physician, out of doors, who comes to cure them on free cost. In a word, those that discover that abundance of wisdom and discretion in ordering their worldly affairs, you would wonder how rational they are, what an account they will give why they do this, and why that,—when it comes to the business of heaven, and the salvation of their souls, they are not like the same men! so that, were you to judge them only by their actions herein, you could not believe them to be men. And is it not sad that the soul, which furnisheth you with reason for the dispatch of your worldly business, should have no benefit itself from that very reason which it lends you to do all your other business with? This, as one well saith, is as if the master of the house, who provides food for all his servants, should be himself kept by them from eating, and so remain the only starved creature in the house. And is not this the sad judgment and plague of God, that is visibly seen upon many, and those that go for wise men too? Are not their souls, which give them understanding to provide for back and belly, house and family, themselves starving in the meantime? being kept by the power of some lust from making use of their understanding and reason so far as to put them upon any serious and vigorous endeavour for the salvation of them.

EPHESIANS VI. 17.

And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

HERE we have the sixth and last piece in the Christian's panoply brought to our hand. A 'sword,' and that of the right make, 'The sword of the Spirit.' The sword was ever esteemed a most necessary part of the soldier's furniture, and, therefore, hath obtained a more general use in all ages, and among all nations, than any other weapon. Most nations have some particular weapons proper to themselves, but few or none come into the field without a sword. A pilot without his chart, a scholar without his book, and a soldier without his sword, are alike ridiculous. But above all these, how absurd is it for one to think of being a Christian without knowledge of the word of God, and some

Digitized by Google

skill to use this weapon! The usual name in Scripture for war is the 'sword,' Jer. xxv. 29: 'I will call for the sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth;' that is, I will send war. And this, because the sword is the weapon of most universal use in war, and also that whereby the greatest execution is done in battle. Now, such a weapon is the word of God in the Christian's hand. By the edge of this his enemies fall, and his great exploits are done; Rev. xii. 11, 'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony.'

CHAPTER I.

TWO NOTES OBSERVED IN GENERAL FROM THE WORDS, AND BRIEFLY TOUCHED UPON.

THERE are two things we may take notice of, before we come to a closer discussion of the words. First, From the sort of arms here appointed for the Christian's use. A weapon that is both defensive and offensive,—such is the word. All the rest in the apostle's armoury are set out by defensive arms,—'girdle, breastplate, shield, and helmet.' Such as are of use to defend and save the soldier from his enemy's stroke. But the sword both defends him, and wounds his enemy. Of like use is the word of God to the Christian. First, It is for defence. Easily might the soldier be disarmed of all his other furniture, how glittering and glorious soever, had he not a sword in his hand to lift up against his enemy's assaults. And with as little ado would the Christian be stripped of all his graces, had he not this sword to defend them and himself too from Satan's fury. 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction,' Psa. cxix. 92. This is like the flaming sword with which God kept Adam out of Paradise. The saint is often compared to Christ's garden. There would not long hang any of their sweet fruit upon their souls were not Satan kept off with the point of this sword. O, this word of God is a terror to him; he cannot for his life overcome the dread of it. Let Christ say but, 'It is written,' and the foul fiend runs away with more confusion and terror, than Caligula at a crack of thunder. And that which was of such force coming from Christ's blessed lips to drive him away, the saints have always found the most successful instrument to defend them against his fiercest temptations. Ask David what was the weapon with which he warded off the blows this enemy made at him, and he will tell you, it was the word of God; Psa. xvii. 4, 'Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips, I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer:' that is, by the help of thy word, I have been enabled to preserve myself from those wicked works, and outrageous practices, to which others, for want of this weapon to defend them have been hurried. Again, the sword, as it defends the soldier, so it offends his enemy. Thus the word of God is, as a keeping, so a killing sword. It doth not only keep and restrain him from yielding to the force of temptations without, but also by it he kills and mortifies his lusts within, and this makes the victory complete. A man may escape his enemy one day, and be overcome by him at another. We read of some that for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, yet because their lusts were never put to the sword, and mortified in them by the power of the word applied to their hearts, were at last themselves overcome and slain by this secret enemy, that lay skulking within their bosoms; 2 Peter ii. 20, compared with ver. 22. Absalom, notwithstanding his being hanged by the hair of his head, might have lived to have taken revenge afterward on them by whom he was then beaten, had not Joab come in timely, and killed him, by sending his darts with a message of death to his heart. We have daily sad experiences of many that wriggle themselves out of their troubles of conscience (by which for a time they are restrained, and their sins, as it were, held by the hair), to rush afterward into more abominable courses than they did before; and all for want of skill to use, or courage and faithfulness to thrust, this sword by faith to the heart of their lusts. Secondly, Observe the order and place wherein this piece of armour stands. The apostle first gives the Christian all the former pieces, and when these are put on, he then girds this sword about him. The Spirit of God in holy writ, I confess, is not always curious to observe method, yet methinks it should not be unpardonable if I venture to give a hint of a double significancy in the very place and

Digitized by Google

order that it stands in. First, It may be brought in after all the rest, to let us know how necessary the graces of God's Spirit are to our right using of the word. There is nothing more abused than the word, and why, but because men come to it with unsound and unsanctified hearts? The heretic quotes it to prove his false doctrine, and dares be so impudent as to cite it to appear for him. But how is it possible they should father their monstrous births on the pure, chaste word of God? Surely it is because they come to the word, and converse with it, but bring not the girdle of sincerity with them, and being ungirt, are unblest. God leaves them justly to miss of truth, because they are not sincere in their inquiry after it. The brat is got upon their own hearts, by the father of lies, and they come to the word only to witness to it. Another reads the word, and is more hardened in his lusts than he was before. He sees some there canonized for saints by the Spirit of God, the history of whose lives is, notwithstanding, blotted with some foul falls, possibly into those very sins in which he lies wallowing, and therefore is bold to put himself into the saints' calendar. And why so impudent? Truly, because he comes to the word with an unholy heart, and wants the breastplate of righteousness to defend him from the dint of so dangerous a temptation. Another, for want of faith to give existence to the truth of the threatening in his conscience, runs boldly upon the point of this sword, and dares the God of heaven to strike him with it. Thus we find those wretches, mentioned by the prophet, playing with this edge-tool, 'Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now,' Jer. xvii. 15: as if they had said, mockingly, Thou scarest us with strange bugbears; judgments that, in the name of God, thou threatenest are coming on us. When will they come? We would fain see them. Is God's sword rusty, that he is so long getting it out of the scabbard? And the despairing soul, for want of a helmet of hope, deals little better with the promise, than the presumptuous sinner with the threatening. Instead of lifting it up to defend him against the fears of his guilty conscience, he falls upon the point of it, and destroys his own soul. Well, therefore, may the apostle first put on the other pieces, and then deliver this sword to them to use for their good. A sword in a madman's hand, and the word of God in wicked men's mouths, are used much alike, to hurt only themselves and their best friends with. Secondly, It may be commended, after all the rest, to let us know that the Christian, when advanced to the highest attainments of grace possible in this life, is not above the use of the word, nay, cannot be safe without it. When girded with sincerity, his plate of righteousness on his breast, shield of faith in his hand, and helmet of hope covering his head, his salvation is out of doubt to him at present; yet even then he must take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This is not a book to be read by the lowest class in Christ's school only, but becoming the highest scholars, who seem most fit for a removal to heaven's academy. It is not only of use to make a Christian by conversion, but to make him perfect also, 2 Tim. iii. 15. It is like the architect's rule and line, as necessary to lay the top-stone of the building at the end of his life, as the foundation at his conversion. They, therefore, are likely to prove foolish builders, that throw away their line before the house be finished.

I now come to take up the weapon in the text,—'And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:' in which words observe these three parts:—First, The weapon itself, that is, 'the word of God.' Secondly, The metaphor in which it is sheathed—'the sword,' with the person whose it is—'the Spirit.' Thirdly, An exhortation to make use of this weapon,—'And the sword,' &c.; that is, take this with all the other before-named pieces. So that to whom he directs the former pieces, he gives the sword of the word to use. Now those, you shall find, are persons of all ranks and relations, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants; he would have none be without this sword any more than without the girdle, helmet, and the rest. Though this I know will not please the papists, who would have this sword of the word, like that of Goliath, laid up out of their reach, in the priests' keeping.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

WHAT IS HERE MEANT BY THE WORD OF GOD.

I BEGIN with the weapon itself, 'The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.' I shall first hold forth the sword naked, and then put it again into the sheath, to handle it under the metaphor of a sword. There is a twofold word of God. First, A substantial, or subsisting word, and that is the Son of God, John i. 1: 'The Word was with God, and the Word was God.' Rev. xix. 13, 'And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God.' This is spoken of a person, and he no other than Christ, the Son of God. But he is not the word of God in the text. The spirit is rather Christ's sword, than Christ the sword of the Spirit: see ver. 15, of the aforenamed chapter,—'Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations.' Secondly, There is a declarative word of God, and this is manifold, according to the divers ways and manners whereby the Lord hath been pleased to declare his mind to the sons of men. At first, while the earth was thinly sown with people, and the age of man so voluminous as to contain many centuries of years, God delivered his mind by dreams and visions, with such-like immediate revelations, unto faithful witnesses, who might instruct others of their generation therein, and transmit the knowledge of the same to after ages: they living so long, that three holy men were able, from the death of Adam, to preserve the purity of religion by certain traditions, till within a few years of the Israelites' going down to Egypt. For as the reverend and learned pen calculates the chronology, Methuselah lived above two hundred years with Adam, and from him might receive the will of God revealed to him. Shem lived almost an hundred years with Methuselah, and Shem was alive to the fiftieth year of Isaac's age, who died but a few years before Israel's going into Egypt. Thus long did God forbear to commit his will to writing, because, it passing through so few, and those trusty hands, it might safely be preserved. But when the age of man's life was so contracted, that from eight and nine hundred years (the then ordinary duration of it) it shrunk into but so many tens, as it was in Moses's time, Psa. xc.; and when the people of God grew from a few persons to a multitude in Egypt, and those corrupted with idolatry; God, intending at their deliverance from thence to form them into a commonwealth, thought it fit (for the preventing of corruption in his worship, and degeneracy in their lives) that they should have a written law to be as a public standard to direct them in both. And accordingly he wrote the Ten Commandments with his own finger on tables of stone; and commanded Moses to write the other words he heard from him on the mount, Exodus xxxiv. 27; yet so that he still continued to signify his will by extraordinary revelations to his church, and also to enlarge this first edition of his written word according to the necessity of the times: reserving the canon of sacred writ to be finished by Christ, the great Doctor of the church, who completed the same, and by the apostles, his public notaries, consigned it to the use of his church to the end of the world; yea, a curse from Christ's mouth cleaves to him that shall add to, or take from the same, Rev. xxii. 18, 19. So that now, all those ways whereby God directly made known his mind to his people, are resolved into one of the Scriptures, which we are to receive as the undoubted word of God, containing in it a perfect rule of faith and life, and to expect no other revelation of his mind to us, which is the meaning of Heb. i. 1, 'God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son,' Therefore called 'the last days,' because that we are to look for no other revelation of God's will. And, therefore, for ever let us abhor that blasphemy of Joachim, Abbas, Wigelians, and others that have fallen into the same frenzy with them, who dream of a threefold doctrine flowing from the three Persons of the Sacred Trinity: the 'law' from the Father, the 'gospel' from the Son, which we have in the New Testament, and a third from the Spirit, which they call *evangelium eternum;* whereas the Spirit of God himself, by whom the Scriptures were indicted, calls the doctrine in it, 'The everlasting gospel,' Rev. xiv. 6. Thus much to shew what is here meant by the word of God. From whence the doctrine follows.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III.

THE DIVINITY OF THE SCRIPTURE SHEWN, AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF ITS OWN TESTIMONY TO PROVE THE SAME.

THAT the Holy Scriptures are the undoubted word of God. By the Scriptures, I mean the Old and New Testaments contained in the Bible; both which are that one foundation whereupon our faith is built, Eph. ii. 21: 'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.' That is the doctrine which God by them hath delivered unto his church, for they were under the unerring guidance of the Spirit, 2 Tim. iii. 16: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Breathed by God, it came as truly and immediately from his very mind and heart, as our breath doth from within our bodies; yea, both matter and words were indited by God; for the things which they spake were 'not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth,' 1 Cor. ii. 12. God did not give them a theme to dilate and enlarge upon, with their own parts and abilities, but confined them to what he indicted. They were but his amanuenses, to write his infallible dictate; or as so many scribes to transcribe what the Spirit of God laid before them. This is given as the reason why no Scripture is to be understood by our private fancy or conceit; but we are to take the meaning of it from itself, as we find one place clears another, because it came not from the private spirit of any man at first; but 'holy men spake as they were moved' (or carried) 'by the Holy Ghost,' 2 Pet. i. 20 and 21 compared; the power that makes the law must expound it.

But may be some will say, Do you bring Scripture to bear witness for itself? The question is, whether the Scripture be the word of God? And you tell us the Scripture saith so, and is that enough? This would carry weight, if it were the word of some sorry creature that stood upon trial; but a greater than man is here. Men need arguments and witnesses to prove and vouch what they say to be true; but the word of God is a sufficient witness to itself, because what truth itself saith, can be no other than a sincere and true testimony. Christ, who thought it derogatory to the dignity of his person, to borrow credit from man's testimony, did yet refer himself to the report that the Scriptures made of him; and was willing to stand or fall in the opinion of his very enemies, as the testimony thereof should be found concerning him, John v. 34, compared with ver. 39; and, therefore, their testimony may well pass for themselves. He that cannot see this sun by its own light, may in vain think to find it with the light of human testimony and argument. Not that these are useless. The testimony of the church is highly to be reverenced, because to it are these oracles of God delivered, to be kept as a sacred deposit; yea, it is called, 'The pillar and ground of truth,' 1 Tim. iii. 15, and the candelstick, Rev. i. 12, from whence the light of the Scriptures shines forth into the world. But who will say, that the proclamation of a prince hath its authenticity from the pillar it hangs on in the market-cross; or that the candle hath its light from the candlestick! The office of the church is ministerial, to publish and make known the word of God; but not magisterial and absolute, to make it Scripture, or unmake it, as she is pleased to allow or deny. This were to send God to man for his hand and seal; and to do by the Scriptures, as Tertullian saith in his apology the heathen did with their gods, who were to pass the senate, and gain their good will, before they might be esteemed deities by the people. And does not the church of Rome thus by the Scriptures, sending us to the pope for leave to believe Scripture to be Scripture? The blasphemous speech of Hermanus is notoriously known, who said, that the Scriptures did *tantum valere, quantum Æsopi Fabula, nisi accedat Ecclesiæ Testimonium.* O how like is Rome to Rome,—superstitious Rome to pagan Rome! We need not travel so far to be determined in this case; the Scripture itself will save us the pains of this wearisome journey, being more able to satisfy us of its own Divine extraction, than the pope sitting in his porphyry chair, with all his cardinals about him. Neither is there any necessity to ask for a messenger to ascend on high, who may from heaven bring down their letters testimonial unto us; seeing they bear heaven's superscription so fairly written upon their own forehead, which denies them to proceed from any but God himself. May a particular man be known from a thousand others by

Digitized by Google

his face, voice, or handwriting? Certainly then it cannot seem strange that the God of heaven should be discerned from his sorry creature, by his voice and writing in the sacred Scriptures. Do we not see that he hath interwoven his glorious name so in the works of creation, that they speak his power and Godhead, and call him Maker in their thoughts, who never read the Bible, nor heard of such a book?—so that they could not steal the notion thence, but had it from the dictates of their own consciences, extorting the acknowledgment of a Deity; and much more will an enlightened conscience and sanctified heart be commanded by the overpowering evidence that shines forth in the Scriptures to fall down and cry, It is the voice of God, and not any creature that speaks in them. Indeed, the grand truths and chief notions found in the Scriptures are so connatural to the principles of grace, which the same Holy Spirit who is the inditer of them hath planted in the hearts of all the saints, that their souls even spring and leap at the reading and hearing of them, as the babe did in Elizabeth's womb at the salutation of the Virgin Mary. The Lamb doth not more certainly know her dam in the midst of a whole flock (at whose bleating she passeth by them all to come to be suckled by her) than the sheep of Christ know his voice in the saving truths of the Scriptures, the sincere milk whereof they desire, and are taught of God to taste and discern from all other. Indeed, till a soul be thus enlightened and wrought upon by the Spirit of God, he may have his mouth stopped by such arguments for the divinity of them as he cannot answer; but he will never be persuaded to rest on them and cordially embrace them as the word of God; as we see in the Scribes and Pharisees, who often were confounded and struck down speechless by the dint of Christ's words; yet as those wretches sent to attack the person of Christ rose up from the earth, (where the majesty of Christ's Deity looking out upon them had thrown them grovelling,) to lay violent hands on him; so those obdurate Pharisees and scribes, after all their convictions, returned to oppose the doctrine he preached, and that, most of them, unto death. Yea, that part of the Scripture which they seemed to cry up so highly, the law of Moses, and made the ground of their quarrel against Christ, our Saviour, is bold to tell them, that, as great admirers as they were thereof, they did not so much as believe it to be the word of God: how could they, indeed, have a true divine faith on it, who wanted the Spirit of God, which alone works it? John v. 46: 'Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.'

Erasmus tells his friend, in a letter, that he met with many things charged on Luther, by the monks, for heresies, which in Augustine passed among them for sound truths; but certainly they did not really believe them to be truths in Augustine which they condemned in Luther. Neither did the Pharisees in truth believe what Moses wrote, because they opposed Christ, who did but verify what Moses before from God's mouth, had spoke. But because, when the Spirit of God comes to raise the heart to a belief of the word of God, he doth it by putting his own weight and force to those arguments which are couched in the word, and so leave the print or character of them sealed upon the soul, therefore I shall draw out an argument or two, among many that are to be found in the Scripture itself, proving the parentage thereof to be divine. I know it is a beaten path I am now walking in, and I shall rather speak the same things for substance which you may meet in many others, only a little otherwise shapen. For my own part, I think it more wisdom to borrow a sword of proved metal at another's hands, than to go with a weak leaden one of my own into the field, and come home beaten for my folly and pride.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARGUMENT FOR THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, DRAWN FROM THEIR ANTIQUITY AND THE SINCERITY OF THE PENMEN THEREOF.

FIRST, The very matter contained in the Holy Scriptures demonstrates their heavenly descent, it being such as cannot be the birth or product of a creature. Let us search the Scriptures a little, and consider the several parts thereof, and see whether they do not all bear the image of God upon them. Consider the historical, prophetical, doctrinal, and preceptive, with its promises and

Digitized by Google

threatenings to enforce the same, and see if the print of a Deity be not stamped upon them all.

First, The historical: in which let us consider the antiquity of the matter related. There are some pieces that could not possibly drop from a creature's pen; where should or could he have his reading and learning to enable him to write the history of the creation? The heathen, by the inquiry of natural reason, have made a discovery thus far, that the world had a beginning, and could not be from eternity, and that it could be the workmanship of none but God; but what is this to the compiling of a distinct history, how God went to work in the production thereof, what order every creature was made in, and how long God was finishing the same! He that is furnished for such an enterprise must be one that was pre-existent to the whole world, and an eye-witness unto every day's work; which man, that was made the last day, cannot pretend to. And yet there is history more ancient than this in the Scripture, where we find what was done at the council table of heaven, before the world began, and what passed there in favour of man, whom afterward he would make. Who could search the court rolls, I wonder, and bring us intelligence of the everlasting decrees then resolved on, and promises made by the Father to the Son, of eternal life in time to be conferred on his elect? Titus i. 2. Secondly, The simplicity and sincerity of the holy penmen in relating what most concerns themselves and those that were near and dear to them. We may possibly find among human authors some that carry their pen with an even hand in writing the history of others, the making known whose faults casts no dishonourable reflection upon him that records them. Thus, Suetonius spared not to tell the world how wicked great emperors were, who therefore is said to have taken the same liberty in writing their lives that they took in leading them. But where is the man that hath not a hair upon his pen when he comes to write the blemishes of his own house or person? Alas! here we find that their pen will cast no ink: they can rather make a blot in their history than leave a blot on their own name; they have, like Alexander's painter, a finger to lay upon these scars, or, if they mention them, you shall observe they learn their pen on a sudden to write smaller than it was wont. But in the history of the Scripture none of this self-love is to be found; the penmen whereof are as free to expose their own shame and nakedness as any others. Thus Moses brands his own tribe for the bloody murder on Shechem, Gen. xxxiv. 30. An enemy could not have set it heavier on their name than he doth it; his own brother is not favoured by him, but his idolatry set upon the file, Exod. xxxii. 21. The proud behaviour of his dear sister, and the plague of God which befell her, escapes not his pen, Numb. xii. No, not the incest of his own parents, Exod. vi. 20. So that we must say of him, concerning the impartiality of his pen in writing, what he himself saith of Levi in the execution of justice, that he 'said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren,' Deut. xxxiii. 9. In a word, to despatch this particular, he is no more tender of his own personal honour than he is of his house and family, but doth record the infirmities and miscarriages of his own life, as his backwardness to enter upon that difficult charge, Exod. iii. iv., wherein he discovered so much unbelief and pusillanimity of spirit, notwithstanding his clear and immediate call thereunto by God himself; his neglect of a Divine ordinance in not circumcising his child, and what that sin had like to have cost him; his frowardness and impatience in murmuring at the troubles that accompanied this place wherein God had set him, Numb. xi. 11—15; and his unbelief, after so many miraculous seals from heaven set to the promise of God, for which he had his leading staff taken from him, and the honour of conducting Israel into Canaan denied him,—a sore and heavy expression of God's displeasure against him, Numb. xx. 12. Certainly, we must confess, had not his pen been guided by a spirit more than human, he could never have so perfectly conquered all carnal affections as not the least to favour himself in reporting things thus prejudicial to his honour in the world. And the same spirit is found to breathe in the evangelists' history of the gospel, they being as little dainty of their own names as Moses was, as may be observed in their freedom to declare their own blemishes and their fellow-apostles'. So far were they from wronging the church with a lame, mutilated

Digitized by Google

story of Christ's life and death, to save their own credit, that they interweave the weaknesses and sins of one another all along their relations. Hence we read of the sinful passion and revenge working in the sons of Zebedee; Peter acting the devil's part to tempt his Master at another time; the ignorance of all the twelve in some main principles of Christianity for a while; their ambition who should be the greatest, and wrangling about it; their unbelief and cowardice, one denying his Lord, and the rest flying their colours, when they should have interposed their own bodies between their Master and the danger, as resolved either to die for him, or at least with him, and not save their lives with so dishonourable a flight: these, and such like passages, declare them to be actuated in their writings by a spirit higher than their own, and that no other than of God himself, for whom they so willingly debase themselves in the eyes of the world, and lay their names in the dust, that the glory of his name might be exalted in this their free acknowledgment.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIVINITY OF THE SCRIPTURES DEMONSTRATED FROM THE PROPHETIC PART IN IT.

SECONDLY, The prophetic part of the Scripture, which contains wonderful predictions of such things to come, as could drop from no pen but one guided by a Divine hand, all which have had their punctual performance in the just period foretold. Indeed, from whom could these come but God? 'Secret things belong to God,' Deut. xxix. 29. And predictions surely may pass very well for secrets; they are such secrets, that God offers to take him, whoever he is, and set him with himself in his own throne, that is able to foretell things to come. Isa. xli. 23: 'Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.' This must be confessed to be a flower of the crown, and an incommunicable property and prerogative of the only true God, who stands upon the hill of eternity, and from thence hath the full prospect of all things, and to whose infinite understanding they are all present; for his will being the cause of all events, he must needs know them, because he knoweth that. The devil, indeed, who is very ambitious to be thought able to do this, and to gain the reputation hereof, hath had his mock-prophets and prophecies in all ages, with which he hath abused the ignorant, credulous world; but, alas! his predictions are no more true prophecies than his miracles are true miracles; he puts a cheat upon the understanding of silly souls in the one, as he doth on their senses in the other; for his predictions are dark and dubious, cunningly packed and laid, which, like a picture, carry two faces under one hood. In these folds the subtle serpent wrapped himself to save his credit, which way soever the event fell out: and this got Apollo the name of Loxias; of *Obliquus; Propter oblique et tortuosa responsa ejus*, because he mocked them that consulted his oracle with such ambiguous answers, that sent them as wise home as they came to him. Indeed, the devil found it necessary thus to do. Had he not with this patch of policy eked out the scantiness of his own understanding, the nakedness thereof would have been seen by every eye, to the shame and contempt of his oracles. Or if his predictions were more plainly delivered, they were, First, Of such things which he spelled out by the help of nature's alphabet, and came to the knowledge of by diving into the secrets of natural causes, before they discovered themselves unto the observation of man's dulled understanding; and this made them be cried up for wonderful predictions, and supernatural, by those who could not see this clue in Satan's hand that guided him. If a man should meet you, and tell you such a friend of yours will die within a few months, whom you left well to your thinking but a few minutes before, and the event should seal the truth of what he said, you might possibly begin to think this a wonderful prophecy; but when you afterwards knew he that told you was a physician, and had, upon much study and strict observation of your friend's bodily estate, found a dangerous disease growing insensibly upon him, you would alter your opinion, and not think him a prophet, but a skilful physician. Thus, did we but consider the vastness of Satan's natural parts (though limited, because created), and the improvement he hath made of them by the study and experience of so many thousand years,

Digitized by Google

we should not count his predictions for prophecies, but rather as comments and explications of the short and dark texts of natural causes, and acknowledge him a learned naturalist, but not deserving the name of a true prophet. Secondly, If he hath not his hint from natural causes, then he gathers his inferences from moral and political causes, which, compared together by so deep a head as his, give him great help and advantage to infer many times what in very great probability of reason will come to pass. Thus, what the devil told Saul would become of him, his army and kingdom, was nothing but what he might rationally conclude from those premises which lay before him, in his being rejected of God, and another anointed by God's own command to be king in his stead, together with the just height and full measure to which Saul's sins might now be thought to have arrived, by his going to a witch for counsel, and a puissant army of the Philistines preparing against him; whose wonted courage now so failed him, that he went rather like a malefactor, pinioned and bound with the terrors of his accusing conscience, to meet an executioner that should give the fatal stroke to him, than like a valiant captain to adorn and enrich himself with the spoils of his enemies: all these laid together, make it appear the devil, without a gift of prophecy, might tell him his doom. Thirdly, God may and doth sometimes reveal future events to Satan; as when God intends him to be his instrument to execute some of his purposes, he may, and doth acquaint him with the same some time before; and you will not say the hangman is a prophet, that can tell such a man shall on such a day be hanged, when he hath a warrant from the king that appoints him to do that office. Thus Satan could have told Job beforehand what sad afflictions would certainly befall him in his estate, servants, children, and his own body, because God had granted him a commission to be the instrument that should bring all these upon him. But neither Satan nor any creature else are able of themselves to foretell such events, which neither arise from natural causes, nor may be rationally concluded to follow from moral and political probabilities, but are locked up in the cabinet of Divine will how they shall fall out; and such are the prophecies which we find in the Holy Scriptures, by which they plainly prove their heavenly extraction. They must needs come from God, that tell us what God only knew, and depended on his will to be disposed of. Who but God could tell Abraham where his posterity should be, and what should particularly befall them four hundred years after his death? For so long before was he acquainted with their deliverance out of Egypt, Gen. xv., which accordingly came to pass punctually on the very day foretold, Exod. xii. 41. How admirable are the prophecies of Christ, the Messiah, in which his person, birth, life, and death, even to the minute, and circumstances of them, are as exactly and particularly set down, many ages before his coming upon the stage, as by the Evangelists themselves, who were upon the place with him, and saw all that was done with their own eyes; and though some things foretold of him may be thought, because small and inconsiderable in themselves, not to deserve a mention in so high and sacred a prophecy, as our Saviour's riding on an ass, Zech. ix. 9, the thirty pieces given for him, and the purchase of the potter's field afterward with them, Zech. xi. 12, 13, and the preserving his bones whole, when they that suffered with him had theirs broken; these, I say, and such like, though they may seem inconsiderable passages in themselves, yet upon due weighing the end for which they are mentioned, we shall find that our weak faith could not well have spared their help to strengthen it in the belief of the prophecy. Indeed, a great weight of the argument to prove the truth and divinity of the prophecy moves upon these little hinges; because the less these are in themselves, the more admirably piercing and strong must that eye be that could see such small things at so great a distance; none but an Infinite Understanding could do this! And now I hope none will dare to ask, But how may we be sure that such prophecies were extant so long before their fulfilling, and not foisted in after these things were done? seeing they were upon public record in the church of the Jews, and not denied by those that denied Christ himself. And truly this one consideration cast into the scale after all the former, doth give an overweight to the argument we are now upon; I mean, that these prophecies were so long and so openly read and known, and consequently impossible that Satan should be ignorant of them, and not take

Digitized by Google

the alarm from them to do his utmost to impede their accomplishment, seeing his whole kingdom lay at stake, so as either he must hinder them, or they would ruin it; and that, notwithstanding all this, together with his restless endeavour against them, they should be all so fairly delivered in their full time; yea, many of them by the midwifery of those very persons that would, if possible, have destroyed them in the womb, as we see, Acts iv. 27: here breaks out the wisdom and power of God, with such a strong beam of light and evidence, that none of the Scriptures' enemies can wishfully look against it.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIVINE EXTRACTION OF THE SCRIPTURE EVIDENT IN ITS DOCTRINAL PART.

THIRDLY, The doctrinal part of the Scriptures, by which in this place I mean only those grounds and principles of faith that are laid down in the Scriptures, must be believed and embraced of all that desire eternal life. There is a Divine glory which is to be seen on the very face of them, being so sublime, that no creature can be the inventor of them. To instance a few. First, God himself, who is the prime object of our faith. Who but God could tell us who he is, and what his nature is? That there is a God, is a notion that natural reason hath found the way to search out; yea, his Godhead and power are a lesson taught in the school of nature, and to be read in the book of the creatures; but how long men, who have no higher teaching, are learning the true knowledge of God, and how little progress they make therein, we see in the poor heathen among whom the wisest philosophers have been such dunces, groping about this one principle, one age after another, and yet not able to find the door: as the apostle tells us, when he saith, that 'the world by wisdom knew not God,' 1 Cor. i. 21. But as for the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, this is such a height as the heart of man never could take aim at, so much as to dream or start a thought of it: so that if God had not revealed it, the world, of necessity, must have for ever continued in the ignorance thereof. And the same must be said of all gospel truths,—Jesus Christ, God-man, justification by faith in his blood, and the whole method of grace and salvation through him; they are all such notions as never came into the heart of the wisest sophists in the world to conceive of; and, therefore, it is no wonder that a little child, under the preaching of the gospel, believes these mysteries which Plato and Aristotle were ignorant of, because they are not attained by our parts and industry, but communicated by Divine and supernatural revelation: yea, now they are revealed, how does our reason gaze at them, as notions that are foreign, and mere strangers to its own natural conceptions, yea, too big to be grasped and comprehended with its short span; which makes it so ready, where grace is not master to keep it in subjection, to object against the possibility of their being true, because itself cannot measure them: as if the owl should say the sun had no light, because her weak eyes cannot bear to look on it. These are truths to be believed, upon the credit of him that relates them, and not to be entertained or rejected as they correspond to, or differ from the mould of our reason. He that will handle these with his reason, and not his faith, is likely to be served as the smith that takes up his hot iron with his hand, and not with his tongs,—what can he expect but to burn his fingers!

CHAPTER VII.

THE DIVINITY OF THE SCRIPTURE PROVED FROM ITS PRECEPTIVE PART.

THE fourth part in our division of the Scripture, is the preceptive, or that which contains commands and precepts. And this will be found to carry the superscription of its Divinity on its forehead, with as legible and fair characters as any of the former.

SECTION I.—The vast extent of Scripture commands, which is such as never any human laws, of the greatest monarch, could pretend unto. Where is the prince, among the sons of men, that ever went about to give laws to all mankind, and did not rather, in his royal edicts and laws, respect that particular people, and those nations, whose lot fell within the circle of his empire? Of

Digitized by Google

all the empires the world ever saw, the Roman was the greatest; and yet when the Roman eagle's wings were grown the largest, they could not overspread more than the third part of this lower world. And how vain and ridiculous had it been for the emperor to have attempted to make a law for those nations, which neither knew him, nor he them. But in the Scripture we find such laws as concern all mankind, wherever they live, and which have been promulgated where the Bible was never seen. Their sound is gone into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Many of the laws in sacred write, they are but a second, and that fairer, edition of what was found written in the consciences of men before the Scripture came forth. So that if those laws that are cut with so indelible a character in the consciences of all the sons of Adam, be of God, then the Scripture must be confessed to proceed from God also. Yet farther, as the Scripture takes all mankind to task, and lays its bonds on all, so its laws bind the whole man; the heart, with its most inward thoughts, is laid in these chains, as well as the outward man. Indeed, the heart is the principal subject, whose loyalty is most provided for in the precepts of Scripture. Those commands that contain our duty to God, require that all be done with the heart and soul. If we pray, it must be in the spirit, or else we had as good do nothing; for we transgress the law of prayer. If it be a law that respects our behaviour to man, still the heart is chiefly intended. 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart,' Levit. xix. 17. 'Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought,' Eccles. x. 20. And accordingly, the promises and threatenings which attend the commands of Scripture, enforce them, and are suitable to the spiritual nature of those commands; the rewards of the one, and punishments of the other, being such as respect the spiritual performance or neglect of them. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' Matt. v. 8. Not, blessed are they whose hands are clean, though their hearts be filthy. So Mal. i. 14, 'Cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth and sacrificeth to the Lord a corrupt thing.' 'The deceiver;' there is the hypocrite, that gives God the skin for the sacrifice, the shape of a duty for the substance, the lean of an outside obedience, instead of the fat of the inward man, namely, the obedience of the heart. And as the principal object which these are levelled against, is the obedience or disobedience of the heart; so the subject or vessel into which the one emptieth its blessings, and the other its curses, is chiefly the soul and spirit. 'They shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live for ever,' Psa. xxii. 26. 'I will comfort you; and your heart shall rejoice,' Isa. lxvi. 13, 14. 'Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse, O God,' Lament. iii. 65. Now, I would fain know the man that ever went about to form such laws as should bind the hearts of men, or prepare such rewards as should reach the souls and consciences of men. Truly, if any mortal man should make a law that his subjects should love him with all their hearts and souls, and not dare, upon peril of his greatest indignation, to entertain a traitorous thought against his royal person, but presently confess it to him, or else he would be avenged on him; he would deserve to be more laughed at for his pride and folly, than Xerxes for casting his fetters into the Hellespont, to chain the waves into his obedience; or Caligula, that threatened the air, if it durst rain when he was at his pastimes, who durst not himself so much as look into the air when it thundered. Certainly, a madhouse would be more fit for such a person than a throne, who should so far forfeit his reason, as to think that the thoughts and hearts of men were within his jurisdiction. Who need fear such a law, when none but the offender himself can bring in evidence of the fact? There have been, indeed, some who, intending to take away the life of their prince by a bloody, murderous knife, have been attacked by their own conscience, and forced by it to confess their own wicked thoughts, before any other could be their accuser, so sacred are the persons of God's anointed ones; but not from the power of man or his law, making them do so, but the dread of God arresting their conscience for violating his law, which, indeed, not only binds up subjects' hands from killing, but hearts also from cursing kings in our very thoughts. This is the law which rules in the consciences of the worst of men; a bit that God rides the fiercest sinners with, and so curbs them, that they can never shake it out of their mouths, Enough to prove the divinity thereof.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.—The spotless purity of Scripture commands do no less evince their divine extraction. 'God is the Holy One,' Isa. xlii. 16. He alone is perfectly holy; 'The heavens are not clean in his sight,' Job xv. 15. He can charge the angels themselves (who may be the 'heavens' in the aforementioned place) with folly, Job iv. 18; because, though they never sinned, yet it is possible they might sin, as some of their order have done, if not kept from it by confirming grace. And as God is the holy person, so the Scripture is the only holy book: all besides this have their errata, which are corrected by this. 'The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever,' Psa. xix. 2; that is, the word of God is clean—called the fear of Isaac, because the object of his fear: the word is clean, and mark, it endureth for ever; that is, it ever continues, and shall be found so. There are dregs and sediment that will appear in the holiest writings of the best men, when they have stood awhile under the observation of a critical eye; but the Scripture hath been exposed to the view and censure of all sorts of men, yet could never have the least impurity charged justly upon it. It is so clean and pure, that it makes filthy souls clean: 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth,' John xvii. 17. That which is itself filthy, may make our clothes and bodies clean; but that which makes our souls pure and clean, must be itself without defilement. And such is the Scripture; there is nothing there which gratifies the flesh, or affords fuel to any lust. No; it puts every sin to the sword, and strikes through the loins of all sinners. 'To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,' Rom. viii. 6. So that, as Athenagoras well said, no man can be wicked that is a Christian, unless he be an hypocrite. For the Scripture, which he professeth to be his rule of faith and life, will not allow him to embrace any doctrine that is false, or practise that which is filthy and unholy. This is that which Christianity can alone glory in. The heathens were led into many abominations by their very religion, and the gods whom they worshipped. No wonder they were so beastly and sensual in their lives, when they served drunken and filthy gods; and the very mysteries of their religion were so horribly unclean, that they durst not let them be commonly known, as having a scent too strong to be endured by any that had not their senses quite stopped, and their foolish minds by the judgment of God upon them, wholly darkened. But the Christian can charge none of his sins upon his God, who tempteth none to evil, but hateth perfectly both the work, and also the worker of iniquity: nor upon his Bible, which damns every sin to the pit of hell, and all that live therein: Rom. ii. 9, 'Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.' O, who could be the author of this blessed book, but the blessed God! If any creature made it, he was either a wicked creature, or one that was holy. First, no wicked creature could do it; neither angel nor man. Surely they would never have taken so much pains to pull down their own kingdom of darkness—(the great plot which runs through the Bible from one end of it to the other.) And if it were the birth of their brain, no doubt, as every one loves his own child, so would they have shewn more love to it, than yet they have done. The implacable wrath that the devil and his party of wicked ones in the world have shewn in all ages to the Scriptures, declares sufficiently it never came from them. No, no, it cannot stand with the interest of unclean spirits or wicked men, to advance holiness in the world. The devil, though bold enough, durst never be so impudent, as to lay claim to this holy, heavenly piece; but if he should, the glorious beauty of holiness that shines on the face of it would forbid any man in his wits to believe that black fiend to be the father of it. It is natural for every creature to beget his like; and what likeness there is between light and darkness it is easy to judge. Neither can any holy creature be the author of it, be he angel or man. Can we think that any, having the least spark of love to God, or fear of his majesty dwelling in their breast, durst counterfeit his dreadful name, by setting it to their work, and abuse the world with such a blasphemy and prodigious lie, as to say, 'Thus saith the Lord,' and prefix his name all along, when not God, but themselves are the authors? Could this impudence and audacious wickedness proceed from any holy angel or man? Doubtless it could not. Nay, farther, durst any holy creature put such a cheat

Digitized by Google

upon the world, and then denounce the wrath and vengeance of God against those who shall speak in God's name, but were never sent of him, as the Scripture mentions? Certainly, that earth which swallowed Korah, and his ungodly companions, for pretending to an authority from God, as good as the priest's, to offer incense, would not have spared Moses himself if he had spoken that in God's name which he had not from him, but was the invention of his own private brain. Thus we see no creature, good or bad, can be the author of the Scriptures; so that none remains but God to own them, which he hath done with miracles enough to convince an athiest of their divinity.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEART-SEARCHING PROPERTY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

THE second argument to demonstrate the divine extraction of the Scriptures shall be taken from the supernatural effects they produce. Nothing can be the cause of an effect higher and greater than itself; if therefore we can find such effects to have been produced by the Scriptures, as are above the sphere of any creature's activity, it will then be evident, that the Scripture itself is supernatural—not the word of a mere creature, but of God himself. What the psalmist saith of thunder, that loud voice of nature from the clouds, we may apply to the voice of God speaking from heaven in the Scriptures; it is a mighty voice, and full of majesty; it breaketh the ceders, kings, and kingdoms, it divideth the flames of fire. The holy martyrs have with one bucket of this spiritual water quenched the scorching flames of that furious element into which their persecuting enemies have thrown them: it shaketh the wilderness of the wild, wicked world, making the stout hearts of the proudest sinners to tremble like the leaves of the trees with the wind; and bringeth the pangs of the new birth upon them, whose hearts before were never disturbed at the most prodigious crimes. It discovereth the forests, and hunts sinners out of their thicket and refuge of lies, whither they run to hide themselves from the hue and cry of divine vengeance. But, to speak more particularly and distinctly, there are four powerful and strange effects which the word puts forth upon the hearts of men, all which will evince its divine original. First, It is a heart-searching power, whereby it ransacks and rifles the consciences of men: it looks into the most secret transactions of the heart, and tells us what we do in our bed-chamber, as Elisha did by the king of Syria, 2 Kings vi. 12. It cometh where no prince's warrant can impower his officer to search—I mean the heart. We read that Christ came to his disciples when the doors were shut, and stood in the midst of them, John xx. 19. Thus the word (when all doors are shut, so that men can have no intelligence what passeth within the breasts of men), comes in upon the sinner without asking him leave, and stands in the midst of his most secret plots and counsels, there presenting itself to his view, and saith to him, as Elisha to Gehazi, Went not my eye with thee when thou didst this and that? How often doth the sinner find his heart discovered, by the word preached, as if the minister had stood at his window, and seen what he did, or some had come and told tales of him to the preacher. Such I have known, that would not believe to the contrary, but that the minister had been informed of their pranks, and so levelled his discourse particularly at their breasts, when he hath been as ignorant of their doings, as of theirs that live in America, and only shot his reproofs like him that smote Ahab, who drew his bow at a venture, without taking aim at the person of any. From whence can this property come, but God, who claims it as his own incommunicable attribute? 'I the Lord search the heart,' Jer. xvii. 10. God is in the word, and therefore it findeth the way to get between the joints of the harness, though sent at random out of man's bow. If any creature could have free ingress into this retiring room of the heart, the devil, being a spirit, and of such a piercing, prying eye, were the most likely to be he; yet even he is locked out of this room, though indeed he can peep into the next. Now if God can only search the heart, then that word which doth the same can come from no other but God himself. Who, indeed, can make a key to this lock, but he that knoweth all the wards of it? Suppose you locked up a sum of money in a cabinet, and but one in

Digitized by Google

the world besides yourself, were privy to the place where you lay this key; if you should find it taken away, and the cabinet opened and rifled, you would soon conclude whose doing it was. Thus, when you find your heart disclosed, and the secret thoughts therein laid open unto you in the word, you may easily conclude, that God is in it; the key that doth this is of his making, who is the only one besides yourself that is privy to the counsels of your heart, that seeth all the secret traverses of your inward man: who but he can send a spy so directly to your hiding-place, where you have laid up your treasures of darkness out of the world's sight? There are two secrets that the word discloseth. First, What a man's own heart knoweth, and no creature besides. Thus Christ told the woman of Samaria, what her neighbours could not charge her with; from which she concluded him to be a prophet,—a man of God. And may we not conclude the Scripture to be the word of God, that doth the same? Secondly, Those things which a man's own heart is not privy to: God is said to be 'greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things,' 1 John iii. 20. He knows more by us, than we by ourselves: and doth not the word dive to the bottom of the heart, and fetch up that filth thence, which the eye of the conscience never had the sight of before, nor ever could, without the help of the word? Rom. vii. 7: 'I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.' And if the word find that out which escapeth the scrutiny of a man's own heart, doth it not prove a Deity to be in it? So argueth the apostle, 1 Cor. xiv. 25, speaking of the power the word preached hath to lay open the heart, 'Thus are the secrets,' saith he, 'of his heart made manifest: and so falling down on his face, will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPERTY OF THE WORD TO AWAKEN AND TERRIFY THE CONSCIENCE.

THE second effect the Scripture hath on the spirits of men, by which its divine pedigree may be proved, is, the power it exerciseth on the conscience to convince and terrify it. Conscience is a castle that no batteries, but what God raiseth against it, can shake; no power can command it to stoop, but that which heaven and earth obey. He that disarms the strong man, must be stronger than he; he that masters the conscience, must be greater than it, and so God only is. Now the word being able to shake this power of the soul, which disdaineth to stoop to any but God, must needs be from him; and that the word exerts such a power upon the conscience, who will doubt? Do we not see it daily chastising the proudest sinners, even to make them cry and whine under its convictions, like a child under the rod? Yea, doth it not slay them outright, that they fall down dispirited at one thunder-clap of the law let off by God upon them? 'When sin revived, I died,' saith Paul. He who before was a man as well provided in his own opinion for his spiritual estate as Job was for his outward, when he had his flocks and herds, sons and daughters, health and prosperity, as yet untouched by the hand of God; but when the law came to charge sin home upon him, it stripped his conscience as naked as Job afterward was in his outward condition. The man's eyes are opened now to see how naked and void of all holiness he is; yea, his fair skin, of pharisaical strictness, with the beauty of which he was formerly so far in love, as if he had been another Absalom, without mole or wart, he now judgeth it to be but odious deformity, and himself a most loathsome creature, by reason of those plague-sores and ulcers that he sees running on him. Yea, such power the word had upon him, that it laid him trembling over the bottomless pit, in a despair of himself, and his own righteousness. Hath any creature an arm like this of the word? Or can any book penned by the wit of man command the heart to tremble at the rehearsal thereof, as this can do? Even a Felix on the bench, when a poor prisoner preacheth this word at the bar to him, is put into a shaking fit. Who but a God could make those monsters of men, that had paddled in the blood of Christ, and who scorned his doctrine so as to account the professors of it fools and idiots, yet come affrighted in their own thoughts, at a secret prick given them in Peter's sermon, and cry out in the open assembly, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?' Doth not this carry as visible a print of a Deity as when Moses clave the rock with a little rod in his hand?

Digitized by Google

But you will say, if there be such a conscience-shaking power in the word, how comes it to pass, that many notorious sinners sit so peaceably, and sleep so soundly under it? They read it at home, and hear it preached powerfully in public, yet are so far from feeling in their consciences, that they remain senseless and stupid; yea, can laugh at the preacher, and shake off all the threatenings denounced, when the sermon is done. First, I answer, many sinners who seem so jocund in our eyes have not such merry lives as you think for. A book may be fairly bound and gilt, yet have sad stories written within it. Sinners will not tell us all the secret rebukes that conscience from the word gives them. If you will judge of Herod by the jollity of his feast, you may think he wanted no joy; but at another time we see that John's ghost walked in his conscience. And so doth the word haunt many a one, who to us appear to lay nothing to heart; in the midst of their laughter their heart is sad; you see the lightning in their face, but hear not the thunder that rumbles in their conscience. Secondly, It is enough that the word doth leave such an impression upon the conscience of any, though not of all, to prove its divinity; one affirmative testimony speaketh louder for the proof of a thing that many negatives do to the contrary. The word is not a physical instrument, but moral, and works not by a virtue inherent in it, but power impressed on it by the Spirit of God that first indited it, and this power he putteth forth according to his own good pleasure; so that the same word sets one man a trembling, and leaves another (in the same seat, may be), as little moved by it, as the pillar he leaneth on. Thus, as two at a mill, so at a sermon, one is taken, and the other left; one is humbled, and another hardened: not from impotency in the word, but freeness of God's dispensing it: his message shall do to whom it is sent, and none else. It is as a man strikes with a sword, back or edge, strong or weak, that makes it cut or not, gives a slight wound or deep. The word pierceth the conscience according to the Divine power that is impressed on it. The three men walked in the fire, and were not singed; others were consumed as soon as they came within scent of it. Shall we say, that fire was not hot, because one was burnt, and the other not? Some their consciences do not so much as smell of the word, though the flames of the threatening fly about their ears; others are set all on fire with the terrors of it. Thirdly, The senseless stupidity of some under the stroke of the word is not to be imputed to its impotency, but to the just judgment of God, wherewith he plagueth them for sinning against the convictions thereof; for commonly they are of that sort, whose consciences are impenetrable, the withering curse of God having lighted upon them; no wonder their judgments are darkened, and consciences seared. It was as great a manifestation of Christ's power (and his disciples judged it so) when with two or three words the fig-tree was blasted, as if he had caused it to spring and sprout when withered and dry. The power of God is as great in hardening Pharaoh's heart, as in melting Josiah's.

CHAPTER X.

THE COMFORTING PROPERTY OF THE WORD TO BLEEDING CONSCIENCES.

THIRDLY. Its power to comfort and raise a dejected spirit. Conscience is God's prison in the creature's own bosom, from whence none can have his release, except by his warrant that made the mittimus, and committed him thither. Indeed he is a weak prince, that hath no prison to commit offenders into, but what another can break open. This, where God lays sinners in chains, is not such. 'A wounded spirit,' saith Solomon, 'who can bear?' Yea, and who can cure? If any creature could, surely the devils were as able as any to do it: but we see they have not to this day found the way to shake off those fetters which God keeps them in: but lie roaring under the unspeakable torment of God's wrath: and they who cannot cure their own wounds, are likely to be but poor physicians to help others; indeed, they acknowledge it beyond their skill and power: 'Wherefore dost thou ask of me,' said the devil to Saul, 'seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thy enemy?' 1 Sam. xxviii. 16. The distress of an afflicted conscience ariseth from the dismal sense of divine wrath for sin: now none can remove this, but he that can infallibly assure the soul of God's pardoning mercy; and this lies so deep in God's heart, that God alone, who only knoweth his own thoughts, can be the messenger to bring the news;

Digitized by Google

and, therefore, the word which doth this can come from none but him; and that it is able not only to do this, but also to fill the soul with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, is a truth so undoubted, that we need not ascend up to heaven for further confirmation; that Spirit which first indited the word hath sealed it to the hearts of innumerable believers. Indeed, all the saints acknowledge their comfort and peace to be drawn out of these wells of salvation. 'In the midst of my perplexed thoughts, thy comforts delight my soul,' says the psalmist. Nay, he doth not only tell us his own experience, whence he had his joy, but others also to have had theirs from the same tap, Psa. cvii. 17: 'Fools because of transgression are afflicted.' And what then can ease them? Will all the rarities that can be got make a diversion to their thoughts, and ease them of their pain? No, for 'their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near to the gates of death,' ver. 18. What cordial then have they left to use, or way to take for their relief? Truly, none but to betake themselves to prayers and tears; 'Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distress,' ver. 19. And with what key doth God open their prison door? It follows, ver. 20, 'He sent his word, and healed them.' If you shall say, all this is meant of outward trouble, yet surely you must grant it holds more strong concerning that which is inward. What, but a word from God's mouth can heal a distressed spirit, when the body pineth and languisheth, till God speaketh a healing word unto it? Great and mighty things are spoken of thee, and done by thee, O holy Word! Thou outviest the world's joy, and makest the soul that hath tasted thy strong consolations to disrelish all sensual delights: so pure and powerful is the light of that joy which thou kindlest in the saint's bosom, that it quencheth all sinful, carnal joy with its beams, as the sun doth the fire of the hearth. Thou conquerest the horror of death, so it is not feared. Thou vanquishest the pains thereof, that they are not felt. Thou treadest on scorpions and serpents, and they have no power to sting or hurt those that believe in thee. Devils know thee, and flee before thee, and leave those consciences which they had so long under their power and tyranny, for thee to enter with thy sweet consolations. Thou quenchest the flames of hell itself, and makest the soul, that was thrown, bound by despair, into the fiery furnace of God's wrath, to walk comfortably. Thou bringest heaven down to earth, and givest the believing soul a prospect of that heavenly Jerusalem, as if he were walking in the blessed streets thereof; yea, thou entertainest him with the same delicacies which glorified saints (though more fully) feed on, so that sometimes he forgets he is in the body, even when pains and torments are upon him. This have the saints experienced more than their own tongue can express; so that we may say to him that yet questions whence the Scriptures came, as the blind man cured by Christ did to the Pharisees, John ix. 30, 'Herein is a marvellous thing,' saith he, 'that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes:' so here, This is marvellous, yea, ridiculous, to say, we know not whence the Scripture is, when it can do all this. Since the world began was it not heard, that the word of a mere creature could remove mountains of despair, and fill the souls of poor sinners with such joy and peace, in spite of hell, and the creature's own unbelief, under the weight of which, as a heavy grave-stone, he lay buried and sealed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONVERTING POWER OF THE WORD.

FOURTHLY, The work of conversion, which none but God, who is the God of all grace, can produce. When John's disciples came to Christ to be resolved who he was, whether the Messias or not, Matt. xi. 4, 5, Christ did not tell them who he was, but sends them to take their answer from the marvellous works he did: 'Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them,' or gospelized; that is, they are transformed into the very nature of the gospel, and actuated by the spirit which breathes in the gospel. By which Christ's drift was, to give an ocular demonstration of their faith, that he who did such miracles could be no other than he whom they sought; and that which brings

Digitized by Google

up the rear, is the converting power of the word, not set last, because the least among them, but rather because it is the greatest wonder of them all, and comprehends in it all the other. When souls are converted, the blind receive their sight; 'you were darkness, but now light in the Lord.' The lame walk, in that the affections (the soul's feet) are set at liberty, and receive strength to run the ways of God with delight. Lepers are cleansed, in that filthy lusts are cured, and foul souls are sanctified; and so of the rest. Now, though the former miracles cease, yet this, which is the greatest, still accompanying the word, affords such a demonstration for its divinity, as reason itself cannot oppose. Is it beyond the skill and strength of the mightiest angel to make the least pile of grass in the field? Much more the new creature in the heart, the noblest of God's works. That, therefore, which new moulds the heart, and makes the creature as unlike to his former self as the lamb is to the wolf; the one meek and harmless, the other fierce and ravenous; must needs be from God; and such changes are the daily product of the word. How many, once under the power of their lusts, throwing, like madmen, their fire-brands about, possessed with as many devils as sins, and hurried hither and thither by these furies, yet at the hearing of one gospel sermon, have you not seen them quite metamorphosed, and, with him in the gospel, out of whom the devil was cast, sitting at Jesus' feet in their right mind, bitterly bewailing their former course, and hating their once-beloved lusts, more than ever they were fond of them? I hope some of you can say, concerning yourselves, as the apostle doth of himself, and others of his brethren, Tit. iii. 3, 5, 'We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,' &c. 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared,—he saved us by the washing of regeneration,' &c. And can you, who are the very epistle of Christ, written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, in the fleshly tables of your hearts, stand yet in doubt whether that word came from God, which is thus able to bring you home to God? How long might a man sit at the foot of a philosopher, before he could find such a commanding power go forth with his lectures of morality to take away his old heart full of lusts, and put a new and holy one in the room of it? Some, indeed, in their school, have been a little refined from the dregs of sensuality, as Polemo, who went a drunkard to hear Plato, and returned a temperate man from his lecture; and no wonder, if we consider what violence such beastly sins offer to the very light of a natural conscience, that lesser light appointed by God to rule the night of the heathen world. But take the best philosopher of them all, and you shall find sins that are of a little finer spinning (such as spiritual wickedness and heart-sins are) that are acted behind the curtain, in the retiring-room of the inner man; these were so far from being the spoils of their victorious arms, that they could never come to the sight of them. But the word treads on these high places of spiritual wickednesses, and leaves not any stronghold of them untaken. It pursues sin and Satan to their bogs and fastnesses, it digs the sinner's lusts like vermin out of their holes and burrows. The heart itself is no safe sanctuary for sin to sit in, the word will take it thence (as Joab from the horns of the altar) to slay it; those corruptions that escaped the sword of the moralist, and honest heathen, fall by the edge of the word. I cannot give a better instance of this converting power of the word, than by presenting you with the miraculous victories obtained by it over the hearts of men, when the apostles were sent out first to preach the grace of Christ. Whenever they came they found the world up in arms against them, and the devil at the head of their troops, to make their utmost resistance; yet what unheard-of victories were got by them! Was it not strange that, without drawing any other sword than the everlasting gospel, they should turn the world upside down, as their enemies themselves confessed? Slighting the devil's works, casting down his holds wherever they came, and overcoming those barbarous heathens, whom the devil had held in his peaceable possession so many thousand years, to renounce their idolatries in which they had been bred, and trained up all their days, to receive a new Lord, and him a crucified Jesus, and this at the report of a few silly men loaded with the vilest reproaches that the wit of man could invent, or malice rake together, to besmear their persons, and render the doctrine they preach odious to the world;—this, I say, is such an unheard-of conquest, as could not

Digitized by Google

be obtained by any less than the arm of the Almighty, especially if we take two or three circumstances into our consideration. First, The meanness of the persons employed to preach this doctrine; being of the meanest and lowest of the people, and many of them as mean in their intellectual accomplishments as they were in their external appearance in the world, having no help from human learning to raise their parts, and set a varnish upon their discourses: men very unfit for such an enterprise, had the success of their works depended on their own furniture, which put their very enemies to a stand whence they had their wisdom, knowing well how low their parentage, and unsuitable their breeding were, to give them any advantage toward such a high undertaking, Acts iv. 13. Surely these poor men could contribute no more by anything that was their own, to that wonderful success which followed their labours, than the blowing of the rams' horns could to the laying of Jericho's walls flat with the ground, or the sounding of Jehoshaphat's musical instruments to the routing of so formidable an army of his enemies: so that we must attribute it to the breath of God, by which they sounded the trumpet of the gospel, and his sweet Spirit charming the hearts of their hearers, that such mighty works were done by them. Secondly, If we consider the nature of the doctrine they held forth and commended to the world, which was not only strange and new, enough to make the hearers shy of it, but so contrary to the humour of man's corrupt nature, that it hath not one thought in the sinner's heart to befriend it. No wonder, indeed, that Mahomet's spiced cup went down so easily, it being so luscious and pleasing to man's carnal palate. We are soon gained to espouse that which gratifies the flesh, and easily persuaded to deliver up ourselves into the hands of such opinions as offer quarter to our lusts, yea, promise them satisfaction. Indeed, we cannot wonder to see Christianity itself generally and readily embraced, when it is presented in Rome's whorish dress, with its purity adulterated. But take the doctrine of the gospel in its own native excellency, before it falls into these hucksters' hands, and it is such as a carnal heart cannot like, because it lays the axe to the root of every sin, and bids defiance to all that take part with it. This may make us step aside (as Moses once did to behold the bush) to see this great wonder. A doctrine believed and embraced that is pure nonsense to carnal reason, teaching us to be saved by another's righteousness, wise with another's wisdom, to trust him as a God, that was himself a child; to rely on him to deliver us from the power of sin and Satan, that fell himself under the wrath of men,—O, how great a gulf of objections which reason brings against this doctrine, must be shot before a man can close with it! Yet this doctrine to find such welcome, that never any prince, at the beat of his drum, had his subjects flock more in throngs to enlist themselves in his muster-roll, than the apostles had multitudes of believers offering themselves to come under baptism,—the military oath given by them to their converts! Thirdly, Consider how little worldly encouragement this word which they preached gave to his disciples, and you will say, God was in it of a truth. Had it been the way to thrive in the world, or had it won the favour of kings to have been their disciples, and taught them how to climb the hill of honour, we could not have wondered to have seen so many worship the rising sun; but, alas! the gospel comes not with these bribes in its hand; no golden apples thrown in the way to entice them on; Christ bids his disciples stoop, not to take up crowns for their heads, but a cross for their backs: 'If any one will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.' They must not dream of getting the world's treasure which they have not, but prepare to part with what they have. When the apostles preached it, the way it led to was not to princes' palaces, with their preferment, but to prisons and dungeons, racks and gibbets; now to see poor creatures so far forget all their worldly interest, estates, and honour, children of their loins, and wives of their bosom, so as to trample upon them, yea, joyfully welcome the bloodiest deaths their enemies could invent, and thank their persecutors for the favour of admitting them to share with the torments of their brethren, as if they had gone to divide a spoil, and not to be made one!—this surely speaks a heavenly power to be in that doctrine, on whose altar, and for whose defence they were so willing to be sacrificed. But though the profession of the gospel cost them so dear, yet, would it but have indulged its disciples to have aimed at their own honour, and

Digitized by Google

pleased themselves with the renown that they should win by their sufferings, and that their names should be written and read in the leaves of fame when they were dead and gone, some Roman spirit might have been found to have endured as much: or if it had taught them, that they should have ascended into their fiery chariot of martyrdom, to receive heaven's glory as the purchase of their patience and prowess, this might have hardened some popish shaveling against the fear of those bloody deaths they met with; but the doctrine they preach allows neither, but teaches them, when they have done their best, and suffered the worst that their enemies' wrath can inflict for the cause of God, to renounce the honour of all, and write themselves unprofitable servants. All these considerations united, make a strong cord to draw any that have staggered in this particular to a firm belief of the divine parentage of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY THE WORD OF GOD IS CALLED THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, AND FROM IT THE POINT RAISED.

HAVING dispatched the first part, which presented us with the weapon itself commended to the Christian's use, that is, 'the word of God;' the second part of the text now comes under our consideration: and that is the notion under which this weapon is commended, or the metaphor in which it is covered, that is, 'the sword of the Spirit.' And here a double inquiry would be made. First, Why the word of God is compared to a sword. Secondly, Why this sword is attributed to the Spirit, and bears his name,—'the sword of the Spirit.'

For the first let this suffice:—The sword being both of general and constant use among soldiers, and also that weapon with which they not only defend themselves, but do the greatest execution upon their enemies, most fitly sets forth the necessity and excellent use of the word of God, by which the Christian both defends himself, and offends, yea, cuts down before him all his enemies.

For the second,—Why is this sword attributed to the Spirit?—some take the abstract here to be put for the concrete, the sword of the Spirit, for the spiritual sword; as if it were no more but, Take the spiritual sword, which is the word of God; according to that of the apostle, 2 Cor. x. 4, 'the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty;' that is spiritual. Indeed, Satan, being a spirit, must be fought with spiritual arms; and such is the word,—a spiritual sword. But this, though true, reacheth not the full sense of the place: πνεῦματος is taken *personaliter*, for the person of the Holy Spirit. And in these three respects the written word is the sword of the Spirit. First, He is the author of it: a weapon it is which his hand alone formed and fashioned; it came not out of any creature's forge: 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,' 2 Pet. i. 21. Secondly, The Spirit is the only true interpreter of the word. Hence that known passage of Barnard,—'*Quo Spiritus facta sunt Scripturæ, eo Spiritu legi desiderant, ipso etiam intelligendæ sunt;*'—The Scriptures must be read, and can be understood by that Spirit alone by whom they were made. He that made the lock, can only help us to a key that will fit its wards, and open its sense: 'No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,' 2 Pet. i. 20. And why not? It follows, because it came not from any private spirit at first; 'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man,' &c., ver. 21. And who knows the mind of the Spirit so well as himself? Thirdly, It is only the Spirit of God can give the word its efficacy and power in the soul. It is his office, as I said,—*Sigillare animum charactere rerum creditarum.* Except he lays his weight on the truths we read and hear, to apply them close, and as it were cut their very image in our minds and hearts, they leave no more impression than a seal set upon a rock or a stone would do; still the mind fluctuates, and the heart is unsatisfied, notwithstanding our own and others' utmost endeavours to the contrary. It was not the disciples' rowing, but Christ's coming, that could quiet the storm or bring them to shore. Not all our study and inquiry can fix the mind, or pacify the heart in the belief of the word, till the Spirit of God comes. 'Do ye now believe?'

Digitized by Google

saith Christ to his disciples, John xvi. 31. How oft, alas! had the same thing sounded in their ears, and knocked at their door for entertainment, but never could be received, till now that the Spirit put in his finger to lift up the latch! B. Davenant, on Colossians, tells us a story out of Gerson, concerning a holy man whom himself knew to be sadly beaten and buffeted with frequent doubts and scruples, even so as to call into question an article of faith, but afterwards was brought into so clear a light, and full evidence of its truth, that he doubted no more of it, than of his own being: and this certainty, saith Gerson, did not come from any new argument he had found out to demonstrate the truth of it, but from the Spirit of God, humbling and captivating his proud understanding, and irradiating the same. The words thus opened present this doctrine:—

That the written word, or the Scripture, is the sword by which the Spirit of God enables the saints to overcome all their enemies. The Spirit will do nothing for them without the word, and they can do nothing to purpose without him. The word is the sword, and the Spirit of Christ the arm which wields it in and for the saints. All the great conquests which Christ and his saints achieve in the world, are got with this sword; when Christ comes forth against his enemies this sword is girded on his thigh, Psa. xlv. 3: 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty;' and his victory over them ascribed to it, ver. 4, 'And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth:' that is, the word of truth. We find, Rev. i. 16, Christ holding seven stars in his right hand, intimating the great care he hath over his people, particularly the ministers, who are more shot at than any other; and how doth he protect them but by his sharped two-edged sword coming out of his mouth? This is the great privilege which the poorest believer in the church hath by the covenant of grace, such a one as Adam had not in the first covenant. He, when fallen, had a flaming sword to keep him out of Paradise, but had no such sword, when innocent, to keep him from sinning, and so from being turned out of that happy place and state. No, he was left to stand upon his own defence, and, by his vigilance, to be a life-guard to himself. But now the word of God stands between the saints and all danger. This will the better appear if we single out the chief enemies with whom the saints' war is waged, and shew how they all fall before the word, and receive their fatal blow from this one sword, as Abimelech slew the 'threescore sons of Jerubaal upon one stone,' Judg. ix. 5.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN HOW THE PERSECUTORS OF GOD'S TRUTH AND CHURCH ARE CONQUERED BY THIS SWORD.

THE bloody persecutor, who breathes slaughter against the saints, and pursues them with fire and faggot. Such a race of giants there ever was, and will be as long as the devil hath any kindred alive in the world, who, when it lies in their power to maintain their father's kingdom of darkness, will not fear to trample under their feet those stars of heaven whose light acquaints the world with their horrid impieties, and so hazards the weakening of the devil's interests in the minds of men. Hence those bloody wars raised, cruel fires of martyrdom kindled, and massacres practised upon the saints, with many devilish witty inventions of torments, that these innocent souls might linger in their pains, and stay the longer in the jaws of death, thereby to feel themselves to die, as one of them barbarously and inhumanly said! Well, what ladders doth God use to scale these mountains of pride? Where are the weapons with which the people of God resists and overcome these monsters of men that thus defy the Lord and his hosts? Wouldst thou know where? Truly, there are to be seen in the tower of David, builded for an armoury,—the word of God I mean. Here hang the shields and bucklers, the swords and darts, by which the worthies of God have in all ages defended themselves against the rage of persecutors, and also triumphed gloriously over their greatest force and power. Out of this brook they take those smooth stones by which they prostrate these Goliaths. This sort of the church's enemies are overcome two ways—either by their conversion or destruction. Now the word of God is the sword that effects both: it hath two edges, Heb. iv. 12, and so cuts on both sides.

Digitized by Google

SECTION I.—The elect, who for a time, through ignorance and prejudice, are joined with the saints' enemies, as busy sticklers and bloody persecutors as the worst,—the word of God is a sacrificing knife to rip open their hearts, and let out the hot blood of their sins, which made them so mad against the church of God, yea, and to prepare them also, by converting grace, as an offering acceptable unto God, as the apostle sheweth, Rom. xv. 16. Thus the murderers of our blessed Lord, we find by one sermon of Peter so strongly wrought upon that they presently vomit up his blood, and, at one prick which the point of this sword gave them, crying for quarter at God's hands, yea, throwing down their persecuting arms, and most freely entering their names into his muster-roll, whose life but a few days before they had so cruelly taken away, about three thousand of them at once being baptized in his name, Acts ii. 41. Yea, Paul himself, (whom I may call, as Erasmus doth Augustine, before his conversion, the great whale that did so much mischief to the church of Christ,) what hook did he use to strike him with but the word? Never had Christ a more furious enemy in the world than this man: his heart was so inflamed with rage against the saints, that the fiery stream thereof came out of his lips as from the mouth of a hot furnace, breathing slaughter against them wherever he went, Acts ix. 1. Now, what force of arms, besides the word preached, did Christ send to take the castle of this bloody man's heart? First, Christ himself took him immediately to task, preaching such a thundering sermon from his heavenly pulpit as dismounted this proud rider, and sent him bound in the fetters of his own troubled soul prisoner even to that place where he thought to have shut up others, and then left the Spirit to carry on the work of his conversion, by applying and keeping the plaster of the word close to his heart; and how powerfully it wrought on him, he himself tells us, Rom. vii. 9: 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died;' that is, when the law came by the convictions of the Spirit to rake in his soul and pierce his conscience, then sin revived those lusts; which law, like a sleepy lion, now in his awakened conscience, roared so dreadfully that he was, as it were, struck dead with the terror of them, as a poor damned creature, and would undoubtedly have gone away in that swoon of horror and despair, had not the joyful news of the gospel grace been by the same word and spirit applied seasonably, to bring him to the life of hope and comfort again. Thus was this boisterous, furious enemy of the saints chained and tamed by the terrors of the law, changed and renewed by the gentleness and mercy of the gospel, that he became more ready to lay down his own life now for the defence of the gospel, than, before conversion, to take away their lives that professed it.

SECTION II.—The saints' persecuting enemies vanish, when ruined and destroyed. Indeed, if they continue impenitent, and harden themselves against the truths and servants of God, that is the end they must all come to. They are like ravenous beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, 2 Pet. ii. 12, and they may know beforehand, as the certainty of their ruin, so what shall procure it, and that is the word of God: 'If any will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies.' It is spoken of those that shall dare to oppose and persecute the faithful preachers of the gospel, fire comes out of their mouths to destroy them. Though they have their will on the bodies of the saints, butchering and burning them, yet the word they preach will be their destruction; that lives, and stays behind to pay the saints' debts, and avenge them on their enemies. God has resolved they must and shall in this manner be killed: the word must give them the fatal stroke. Julian confessed as much when bleading under his deadly wound; though the arrow came out of a Persian bow, yet the wretch knew it was sent by a higher than a Persian hand: *Vicisti Galilæe!*—O Galilean, thou hast overcome, and been too hard for me! His conscience told him that his spite against the truth of Christ was his death; and many more besides him have acknowledged as much when under the hand of justice. The word of God, which they have opposed, hath appeared to them as engraven upon their judgments. O this sword of the word, it hath a long reach! It is at the breast of every enemy God and his saints have in the world: and though at present they cannot see whence their danger should come, (they are so great and powerful, so safe and secure, as they think,) yet the word of God having set down their doom already, God will sooner or later let in their

Digitized by Google

destruction upon them. When the prophet would express the indubitable ruin of the Philistines impending, mark what prognostic he gives, 'Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea-coast! the word of the Lord is against you;' as if he had said, You are a lost, undone people; the whole world cannot save you, for the word of the Lord is against you. The threatening of the word, like lightning or mildew, blasts wherever it goes, and its curse burns to the very root. Hence all the seven nations of Canaan fell into the hand of the Israelites, like ripe figs into the mouth of him that shakes the tree. The word of the Lord cursing them had gone before them to make their conquest certain. This Balak knew, and therefore would have given ever so much for a few words out of Balaam's mouth to have cursed Israel in God's name. The truth is, though we look upon the monarchs of the world, and their armies, as those which have the sway of the affairs of the world, yet these are no more than the fly on the wheel; it is the word of God that hath the great stroke in all that is done on the world's stage: 'I have set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, to build, and to plant,' Jer. i. 10. Indeed, the whole earth is God's ground; and who hath power to build on his ground, or pull down, but himself? And in his word he hath given his mind what he will have done to his enemies, and for his saints; and therefore, as all the mercies they have, they receive and acknowledge as gracious performances of the promise, so all the judgments executed on their enemies as accomplishments of the threatenings of the word, called therefore, 'the judgments written.'

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN IT IS SHEWN HOW VICTORIOUS A SWORD OVER THE SEDUCER AND HERETIC THE WORD OF GOD IS.

THE seducer is another enemy the Christian hath to cope with, and no less dangerous than the other, nay, in this respect, far more formidable; the persecutor can kill only the body, but the seducer comes to poison the soul. Better to be slain outright by his sword, than to be taken alive (as the apostle phraseth it) in this snare of the devil, which these whom he sends forth privily lay where they are often least suspected. When Paul fell into the hands of the persecutor, he could glory and rejoice that he had escaped the latter: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,' 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. See how this holy man triumphs and flourishes his colours, as if the field were fought, and the day won; whereas, good man, he was now going to lay his head on the block under the hand of bloody Nero, as you may perceive, ver. 6, 'I am now ready to be offered up:' alluding to the kind of death, it is likely, he was shortly to undergo. But you will say, What great cause, then, had he to cry *victoria*, when his affairs were in such a desperate condition? This made him triumph, 'he had kept the faith;' and that was a thousand times more joy and comfort to him, than the laying down his life was a trouble. If he had left the faith, by cowardice, or chosen instead of it any false doctrine, he had lost his soul by losing that; but having kept the faith, he knew that he did but part with his life to receive a better at God's hand than was taken from him by man's. The locusts, mentioned Rev. ix. 3 (which Mr. Mede takes to be the Saracens, who were so great a scourge and plague to the Roman world newly Christianized), we find 'they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails,' ver. 10; which that learned writer interprets to be their cursed Mahometan doctrine, with which they poisoned the souls, wherever their conquering sword came. It seems, though the sword of war in the hand of a bloody enemy be a heavy judgment to a people, yet the propagation of cursed errors is a greater; this is the sting in the tail of that judgment. I do not doubt but many that were godly might fall by the sword of that enemy in such a general calamity, but only those that were not among God's sealed ones felt the sting in their tail, by being poisoned with their cursed imposture; and, therefore, they alone are said to be hurt by them, ver. 4. We may be cut off by an enemy's sword and not be hurt, but we cannot drink of their false doctrine, and say so. Now, the word of God is the sword, whereby the Spirit enables the saints to defend themselves against this enemy; yea, to rout and ruin this

Digitized by Google

subtle band of Satan. We read of Apollos, Acts xviii. 28, that 'he mightily convinced the Jews;' he did, as it were, knock them down with the weight of his reasoning: and out of what armoury fetched he the sword with which he so prevailed? See the same verse, 'Shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was Christ; and, therefore, is said to be 'mighty in the Scriptures,' ver. 24: a mighty man of valour, and so expert through his excellent knowledge in them, that the erroneous Jews could no more stand before him, holding this sword in his hand, than a child with a wooden dagger can against a giant formidably armed with killing weapons. When Paul warns Timothy to stand upon his defence carefully against seducers, he devises no better counsel how he might keep out of their hands, than sending him to the Scriptures, and bidding him shut himself up within these: 'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned,' 2 Tim. iii. 14. And in the next verse, he shews what lesson he means that he had learned, by telling him, that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation; and, by consequence, wiser than all his enemies, if he stuck close to them. Other arms we may load ourselves with by tumbling over many authors, but he that hath this sword, and hath been taught of the Spirit the use of this weapon, is provided well to meet the stoutest champion for error which the devil hath on his side. With this, poor women have been able to disarm great doctors of their studied arguments, defeating all their art and logic with one plain place of Scripture: as she who killed Abimelech, that great commander, by tumbling a piece of millstone on his head. Out of this armoury came those weapons Paul tells us are so 'mighty through God, casting down imaginations,' or reasonings; by which an ancient will have the Greek philosophers' syllogisms to be meant. Indeed, he that hath the word on his side, and a holy skill to use it, hath as much advantage of his adversary that comes with other armour (let him be never so good a fencer) as a man with a good sword hath over him that comes forth only with a bulrush in his hand. All error dreads the light of the word, and fears more to be examined by that, than a thief does to be tried before a strict judge. *Hereticorum sententias prodidisse est superasse*, saith Hieron. Unfold them, or bring them and the word face to face, and, like Cain, they hang down their head, they are put to shame. This is the only certain ordeal to try suspected opinions at. If they can walk upon this fiery law unhurt, unreproved, they may safely pass for truths, and none else. Paul tells of some 'that will not endure sound doctrine,' 2 Tim. iv. 3. Alas! how should they, when their minds are not sound? It is too searching for them. Gouty feet cannot go but on a soft way, which generally yields to them. Such must have a doctrine that will comply with their humour, which the word will not, but rather judge them; and this they think it will do too soon at the great day, therefore, now they shun it, lest it should torment them before their time. Thus, the Quakers have their skulking hole to which they run from the Scripture, at whose bar they know their opinions would be cast, and therefore appeal to another, the light within them; or, in plain English, their natural conscience, a judge which is known too well to be corrupt, and easily bribed to speak what the lusts of men will often have him do. Ah, poor creatures, what a sad change have they made, to leave the word, that is an inflexible rule of faith, which can no more deceive them than God himself, to trust the guidance of themselves to themselves; a more ignorant, unfaithful guide, the devil could not have chosen for them. 'He that is his own teacher,' saith Bernard, 'is sure to have a fool for his master.' God himself, by Solomon, saith, 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise,' Prov. xii. 15; but he most wise, that makes the word of God the man of his counsel. The Papist hath his thicket and wood at his back also,—antiquity and traditions, to which he flies before the face of the Scripture for sanctuary, as Adam did to a bush when God came to him; as if any antiquity were so authentic as God's own oracles; and any traditions of men to be laid in the balance with the Scripture. To name no more, the Socinian folds himself up in his own proud reason, and assumes such state, that the sense of Scripture must be reconciled to his reason, and not his reason bent to the Scripture; he must have a religion and Scripture that fits the model which his own reason draws, or he will have neither: the root of many prodigious errors and heretics, like those of whom Tertullian speaks, *Qui Platonicum et*

Digitized by Google

Aristotelicum Christianismum procuderunt, who went to the philosopher's forge to shape a Christianity. What is this, but to carry gold to be weighed in the chandler's scales, and to look for the sun by the light of the moon? A modern divine saith, 'Most heresies have sprung either from pride, ignorance, or the sophistry of reason.' The last of which seems to be the rock on which Paul observes some to have split; 'some professing have erred concerning the faith,' 1 Tim. vi. 21, and, therefore, so affectionately exhorts Timothy to keep off this dangerous shore, and steer his course by the word, ver. 20: 'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust,' &c.; for this which is here committed to him, I take for 'the form of sound words' he exhorts him to hold fast in the Second Epistle, chap. i. 13.

Object. But we see heretics quote Scripture for their most prodigious errors, and draw this sword for their defence, as well as the orthodox: how then is it such a powerful instrument against error? *Ans.* What will not men of subtle heads, corrupt hearts, and bold faces, dare to do for carrying on their wicked party, when once they have espoused an error or any sinful way? Korah and his ungodly company dare give out that the Lord is among them, and they have as much to do with the priesthood as Aaron himself, on whom the holy oil was poured, Numb. xvi. 13. And Zedekiah, that arch flatterer, fears not to father his lie on the God of truth himself, 1 Kings xxii. 11: 'He made him horns of iron, and said, Thus saith the Lord, With these thou shalt push the Syrians until thou hast consumed them;' whereas, God never spoke such a word. It is no marvel, then, to see any lay their bastard-brats at God's door, and cry, they have Scripture on their side. By this impudence, they may abuse credulous souls into a belief of what they say, as a cheater may pick the purses of ignorant people, by shewing them something like the king's broad seal, which was his own forgery; yea, God may suffer them to seduce others of more raised parts and understanding, as a just judgment on them for rebelling against the light of their own conscience: as Pharaoh, by the false miracles of the magicians, was set farther from complying with Moses: and those of the antichristian faction, 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11, who, 'because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God sends them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie.' But sincere souls, that search humbly for truth, and have no other design in their inquiry after it, but that they may know the will of God, and obey it, they shall find, upon their faithful prayers to God, a light most clear, shining from the Scripture to guide them safe from those pitfalls of fatal errors into which others fall, towards whom the dark side of this cloud stands: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments, Psa. cxi. 10. The fox, when hard put to it, will fall in subtly with the dogs, and hunt with them as one of their company, but then his strong scent, which he cannot leave behind him, betrays him. Thus heretics, to shelter their errors, will crowd them in among Scripture truths, and by their false glosses make them seem to be of their company, but they cannot so perfume their rotten opinions, but their rank scent and savour will be smelt, and discerned by those who have their senses exercised. A heretic can reap no advantage by an appeal to the Scripture. What Christ saith in another case, Matt. xxvi. 52, 'All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword,' is most true of all heretics; they are confounded and confuted by that very sword of the word which they lift up to defend themselves.

CHAPTER XV.

OUR THIRD ENEMY, MADE UP OF AN ARMY OF CORRUPTIONS AND LUSTS WITHIN, AND THE POWER OF THIS SWORD OF THE SPIRIT TO CONQUER THEM.

THIRDLY, Our own lusts are the next adversary we have to grapple with. Thus the farther we go the worse enemy we meet. These are more formidable than both the former; partly because they are within us, men of our own house, lusts of our own bosom, which rise up against us; and partly because they hold correspondence with a foreign foe, the devil himself, who, as he beat a man at first with his own rib, so he continues to do us the worst mischief with our own flesh. The fire of our lusts is ours, but the flame commonly is his, because his temptations are the bellows that blow it up. And when such a fire meets with such

Digitized by Google

a strong wind to spread and carry it on its wings, whither will it fly? Oh, how hard to quench it! A whole legion of devils are as soon cast out of the body as one lust out of the soul; yea, sooner. Satan likes his lodging better in the heart than in the house. He came the more willingly out of the man into the swine, Matt. viii. 31, because, by coming out of his body, and contenting himself awhile with a meaner house, he hoped for a fairer way thereby to get fuller possession of their souls, which indeed he obtained, Christ leaving them most justly to his rule, who were so soon weary of his sweet company. Now the word is the only weapon (like Goliath's sword, none to equal this,) for the hewing down and cutting off this stubborn enemy. The word of God can master our lusts when they are in their greatest pride: if ever lust rageth at one time more than another, it is when youthful blood boils in our veins. Youth is giddy, and lust then is hot and impetuous: his sun is climbing higher still, and he thinks it a great while to night; so that it must be a strong arm that brings a young man off his lusts, who hath his palate at best advantage to taste sensual pleasure: the vigour of his strength affords him more of the delights of the flesh than crippled age can expect, and he is farther from the fear of death's gun-shot, as he thinks, than old men who are upon the very brink of the grave, and carry the scent of the earth about them, into which they are suddenly to be resolved. Well, let the word of God meet this young gallant in all his bravery, with his feast of sensual delights before him, and but whisper a few syllables in his ear, give his conscience but a prick with the point of its sword, and it shall make him fly in as great haste from them all, as Absalom's brethren did from their feast when they saw Ammon their brother murdered at the table. When David would give the young man a receipt to cure him of his lusts, how he may cleanse his whole course and way, he bids them only wash in this Jordan, Psa. cxix. 9. By what means, or 'wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to thy word.' It is called the 'rod of his strength,' Psa. cx. 2. God, we know, wrought these great miracles whereby he plagued the Egyptians and saved the Israelites, with the rod in Moses's hand: by that he tamed proud Pharaoh, making him and his people at last to let go their hold of the Israelites, yea, in a manner to thrust them out from them, and be as glad of their room as before of their company; by that he divided the sea for Israel's passage, and covered the Egyptians in its waves; by that he smote the rock; and by this rod of his word he doth as great wonders in the souls of men: by this he smites their consciences, cleaves the rocks of their hard hearts, divides the waves of their lusts, and brings poor sinners from under the power of sin and Satan. Never could Austin get a jail delivery from his lusts till he heard that voice, *Tolle lege, tolle lege*; upon which, as himself tells us, (*Lib. Confess.* viii.,) he presently took up the Bible, and that one place, Rom. xiii., to which his eye was directed, like a mighty earthquake so shook the powers of his soul, that the prison-doors of his heart immediately flew open, and those chains of lusts which with all his skill and strength, he could never file off, did now on a sudden fall off. Never man, by his own confession, was more a slave to his lusts, and tied with a stronger chain of delight to them, than himself; as he saith, he tumbled in the puddle of his filthy lusts with as much delight as if he had been rolling in a bed of spices, and anointing himself with the most precious ointments; yet this one word came with such a commanding power to him, that it tore them out of his very heart, and turned his love into a cordial hatred of them, who before would have sooner let his heart be plucked out of his bosom, than to be deprived of these. And as the word is the weapon by which he with a strong hand brings poor sinners out of the power of Satan and sin into a state of freedom, so he uses it to defend his saints from all after-storms of temptations. David will tell us how he stood upon his guard, and made good his ground against his enemy, Psa. xvii. 4: 'Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer:' as if he had said, Would you know how it comes to pass that I escape those ungodly works and practices which men ordinarily take liberty to do? I must ascribe it to the good word of God; it is this I consult with, and by it I am kept from those foul ways whereinto others, that make no use of the word for their defence, are carried by Satan the destroyer. Can we go against sin and Satan with a better weapon than Christ used to vanquish the tempter with? And certainly Christ did it, to set us an

Digitized by Google

example how we should come armed into the field against them; for Christ could with one beam shot from his Deity (if he had pleased to exert it) have as easily laid the bold fiend prostrate at his foot, as afterward he did them that came to attack him; but he chose rather to conceal the majesty of his Divinity, and let Satan come up closer to him, that so he might confound him with the word, and thereby give a proof of that sword of his saints, which he was to leave them for their defence against the same enemy. The devil is set out by the leviathan, Isa. xxvii. 1: him God threatens to punish with his strong sword; alluding to that great fish, the whale, which fears no fish like the sword-fish, by whom this great devourer of all other fish is so often killed; for, receiving one prick from his sword, he hasteneth to the shore, and beats himself against it till he dies. Thus the devil, the great devourer of souls, who sports himself in the sea of this world, as the leviathan in the waters, and swallows the greatest part of mankind without any power to make resistance against him, is himself vanquished by the word. When he had to do with a saint armed with this sword, and instructed how to use this weapon, he then, and not till then, meets his match.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FOURTH AND LAST ENEMY THE CHRISTIAN ENGAGETH, MADE UP OF MANY TROOPS OF AFFLICTIONS, TOGETHER WITH HIS VICTORY OVER THEM, OBTAINED BY THIS SWORD OF THE WORD.

A FOURTH enemy that meets the Christian, is an army made up of many bands of afflictions, both outward and inward; sometimes one, sometimes another, assailing him; yea, often a whole body of them pouring their shot together upon him. This was Paul's case: 'Without were fightings, within were fears,' 2 Cor. vii. 5. He endured a great fight of external afflictions and buffetings within his own bosom, at once. And that is sad indeed, when a city is on fire within, at the same time that an enemy is battering its walls without. Yet this is often the condition of the best saints, to have both the rod on their backs, and rebukes from God in their spirits, at once, Psa. xxxix. 11: 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth.' God sometimes corrects with outward crosses, but smiles with inward manifestations, and then he whips them, as I may say, with a rosemary-rod,—the one sweetens and alleviates the other. At another time he sends a cross, and encloseth a frown in it. He whips with outward affliction, and, as an angry father, every lash he gives his child, tells him, this is for that fault, and that for this, which exceedingly adds to the smart of the correction, and is the very knot on the whip, to see his Father so much displeased with him: and when the poor Christian lies under the hand of an afflicting God, or under the rebukes of a frowning God, Satan will not be long from the Christian, or wanting to throw his salt and vinegar into the wounds that God hath made in his flesh or spirit, thereby to increase his anguish and to lead him farther into temptation, if he can have his will. Indeed, God often sends so many troops of various afflictions to quarter upon some one Christian, that it puts him hard to it to bid them all welcome and entertain them with patience; yea, it would pose any one (that knows not what service the word of God doth the Christian, and the supplies it brings him in,) to conceive how his spirit and his faith should be kept from being eaten up and swallowed into despair by them. But the word of God bears all the charge he is at: this is his counsellor and comforter. David tells us his heart had died within him but for it, Psa. cxix. 92: 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.' The word was his spiritual Abishag, from which his soul got all its warmth; all the world's enjoyments heaped on him would have left him cold at heart, if this had not lain in his bosom to bring him to a kindly heat of inward peace and comfort: ver. 50, of the same psalm, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me.' Not the crown in hope, (for some think it was not on his head when this psalm was penned,) but the word in his heart, to which he was beholden for his comfort. A word of promise is more necessary at such a time to a poor soul than warm clothes are to the body in cold weather. When Adam was thrust naked out of Paradise into the cold blast of a miserable world, where from his own guilty conscience within and crosses without, he

Digitized by Google

was sure to meet with trouble enough, then God gave him a word of promise, as you may observe, to fence his soul, before he taught him to make coats to clothe his body, Gen. iii. 15, compared with ver. 21. The Lord knew how indispensably necessary a word of promise was to keep him from being made a prey the second time to the devil, and from being swallowed up with the dismal sight of those miseries and sorrows in which he had thrown himself and posterity; therefore he would not suffer him to lie open to the shock of their assaults one day, but presently puts the sword of a promise into his hand, that with it he might defend and comfort his sorrowful heart in the midst of all his troubles. It was the speech of a holy man, after God had made that sweet place, Matt. xi. 28, 'Come unto me, ye that are weary and heavy laden,' &c., the messenger to open his dungeon of soul-trouble, and bring him into the light of inward joy, that he had better be without meat, drink, light, air, earth, life, and all, than without this one comfortable scripture. If one single promise, like an ear of corn rubbed in the hand of faith, and applied by the Spirit of Christ, can afford such a full, satisfying meal of joy to a hunger-bitten, pining soul, O, what price can we set on the whole field of Scripture, which stands so thick with promises? Love is witty, and sets the head at work to devise names for the person we love dearly, such names as may at once express how highly we prize them, and also more endear them to us, by carrying on them the superscription of that sweetness which we conceive to be in them. Thus many holy persons have commended the promises to us with their appreciating names:—The saints' legacies; the breasts of God, full of milk of grace and comfort; the saint's plank to swim upon to heaven. Indeed, we might rob the world of all her jewels, and justly hang them on the ear of the promise, and apply all the excellences she boasts of unto the promises. There are more riches and treasure to be had in one promise than all the gold and silver of the Indies is worth,—'Exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Pet. i. 4: by them a poor believer may lay claim to heaven and earth at once; for godliness hath the promise of this life and the other also. But that for which in this place I would commend their excellency is the admirable service they do, and the efficient succour they afford a poor soul in the day of his greatest distress. They are the granary of spiritual provision, whereby our Joseph, our Lord Jesus, nourisheth and preserveth alive his brethren in a time of famine. They are a hive of sweetness, where the believing soul in the winter of affliction (when nothing is to be gathered abroad from the creature) both lies warmly and lives plentifully on the stock of comfort there laid up. They are, in a word, the fair havens and safe road into which the tempted soul puts his weather-beaten ship, where it lies secure till the heavens clear, and the storms are over, which the world, sin, and Satan raise upon him: yea, when death itself approacheth, and the devil hath but one chance more for the game, one skirmish more to get or lose the victory for ever, then faith on the promise carries the Christian's soul out of the garrison of his body (where he hath endured so hard a seige) with colours flying, and joy triumphing to heaven, leaving only his flesh behind in the hands of death, and that with an assured hope of having it redeemed out of its power at the day of resurrection and restitution of all things.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHURCH OF ROME CHARGED OF HIGH PRESUMPTION AND GREAT CRUELTY IN DISARMING THE PEOPLE OF THIS SWORD OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Is the word the sword of the Spirit whereby the Christian vanquishes his enemies? Then we may justly charge the Church of Rome with cruelty to the souls of men in disarming them of that weapon with which alone they can defend themselves against their enemies that seek their eternal ruin. It is true they have some fig-leaves with which they would fain hide their shameful practice, making the world believe they do it in mercy to the people, lest they should cut and wound themselves with this weapon. We see, say they, how many errors and heresies the world swarms with by the mistakes of the vulgar; yea Peter himself they dare bring as a witness on their side, who saith that there 'are some things hard to be understood' in Paul's epistles, 'which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do the other scriptures, unto their

Digitized by Google

own destruction,' 2 Pet. iii. 16; and therefore they judge that as the Scripture is so dangerous for ordinary people to meddle with, it is best to put it out of their reach, as we do a sword from children, though they cry much for it. See what a fair glove they draw over so foul a hand. But did Peter, because some unlearned and unstable souls wrested the Scripture, forbid them or any other, how weak soever, to read the Scripture? This had carried some weight with it; but we find just the contrary, for, in the following verses, the counsel he gives Christians, that they may not be led away with the error of the wicked, is, 'to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,' ver. 18. Light is the chariot that conveys the influences of the sun; so the knowledge of Christ brings with it the influences of his grace into the heart. And how did Peter mean they should grow in the knowledge of Christ, if he would not have them read the Scriptures, which is the only book where it is taught? But the Papists would have their people learn the knowledge of Christ from their preaching of him, and not from the Scriptures, which they cannot so safely converse with. But, First, How shall they be assured that what they preach is true, except they have the Scripture, to which, as unto the true touchstone, they may bring their doctrine to be tried? Thus did the Bereans by Paul's sermon, Acts xvii. 11; a preacher as good, I trow, as any of theirs. And, Secondly, Suppose they preach the truth, can they warrant that their words shall not be perverted and mistaken by their hearers? And if they cannot, why then are they suffered to preach in a vulgar tongue, when the word of God, for the same reason, is forbidden to be read by the people in a known tongue? Truly, I am of that learned man's mind, that if God himself may not speak in a vulgar tongue, I see far less reason that a friar should; and so the people should know nothing at all of Christ.—*Mede on* Jer. x. 11. No, the true reason why they forbid the Scripture to be read is not to keep them from errors and heresies, but to keep them from discovering those which they themselves impose upon them. Such trash as they trade in would never go off their hand did they not keep their shop thus dark; which made one of their shavelings so bitterly complain of Luther for spoiling their market, saying, that but for him they might have persuaded the people of Germany to eat hay. Anything indeed will go down a blind man's throat. I do not wonder that their people, thus kept in ignorance, do so readily embrace their fopperies, and believe all their forgeries. The blind man must either sit still or go whither he pleaseth that leads him. We read of a whole army, when once smitten with blindness, carried out of their way by one single man that had his eyes in his head, 2 Kings vi. 19. But this we may wonder at, that men who know the Scriptures (as many of their leaders do) and acknowledge their divinity dare be so impudent and audacious as to intercept this letter sent from the great God to the sons of men, and not suffer them, except a few whom they think fit, to look on it, though it be subscribed and directed by God himself, not to any party or sort of men, but to every man where it comes, Rom. i. 7; 2 Cor. i. 1. This is a piece of impudence that cannot be parallelled. Wherefore are laws made, but to be promulgated?—Scripture written, but to be read and known of all men? I am sure the apostle, by the same authority with which he wrote his epistle, commands it to be read in the church, Col. iv. 16. And did the ministers of those churches pocket them up, and conceal them from the people's notice, lest they should, by perverting them, be made heretics? It is too true, some wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction: and so do some, for want of care in eating, choke themselves with their bread; must all therefore starve for fear of being choked? Some hurt themselves and friends with their weapons; must therefore the whole army be disarmed, and only a few chief officers be allowed to wear a sword by their sides? Truly, if this be argument enough to seal up the Bible from being read, we must not only deny it to the meaner and more unlearned sort, but also to the great rabbies and doctors; for the grossest heresies have bred in the finest wits. Prodigious errors have been as much beholden to the sophistry of Arius, as to the ignorance of Ætius. So that the upshot of all will be this,—the unlearned must not read the Scriptures, because they may pervert them through ignorance; nor the learned, because they may wrest them by their subtlety. Thus we see, when proud men will be wiser than God, their foolish minds darken, till they lose the reason and understanding of men.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII.

AGAINST THE SAME CHURCH OF ROME, FOR IMPUTING INSUFFICIENCY TO THE SCRIPTURES.

THIS falls heavily upon them that charge the Holy Scriptures with insufficiency, as not containing all things necessary to salvation. What a horrid blasphemy is this, and reproach to the great God, that he should send his people into the field, and put such a wooden sword into their hand as is not sufficient to defend them, and cut their way through their enemies' powers to heaven, whither he orders them to march! Would any gracious prince, that loves the lives of his subjects, give them arms that are not fit to oppose such an enemy as comes out against them, if he knows how to furnish them with better? Nay, would he give them such weak and insufficient weapons for their defence, and then charge them to use no other? This were unworthily to send them as sheep to the shambles, and could signify nothing, but that he had a mind their throats should be cut by their enemies. And doth not God himself highly commend this sword of the Scripture to his people, when he tells Timothy, 'It is able to make him' (as a Christian) 'wise unto salvation,' 1 Tim. iii. 15; and as a 'man of God' (or minister of the gospel) 'perfect, and thoroughly furnished unto all good works,' ver. 17. Yea, doth he not also forbid us the use of any other weapon, than what the Scriptures furnish us withal? 'To the law and to the testimony,' he sends us, Isa. viii. 21, and makes it a renouncing of our allegiance to him, to go any where else for counsel or protection than to his written word:—'Should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?' Then follows,—'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' ver. 19, 20. It seems, then, God doth not count we seek him, except we inquire for him at the law and the testimony, and bring all we hear to their test. Surely, that which is intended by God to be to his people (what the standard and town-bushel are to the market) a rule to measure all doctrines by, is itself exact and sufficient. But the world, by this time, knows where the insufficiency of the Scripture lies. Sufficient they are for God's ends, but not for the pope's. They are able to furnish every true Christian with wisdom enough how he should save his soul; but the pope finds himself grieved, that they are not so useful to help him to keep a triple crown on his head, and do not furnish him with grounds from which he may defend the lordly power and godlike infallibility which he claims, with other doctrines held forth by him; and this is the only defect he can charge the Scriptures with, to supply which the rabble rout of traditions is brought into the church; all taught to speak the pope's sense before they see the light: and that reputation may be gained to these unknown witnesses, this way their fine wits, with the devil's help, (who owes the Scripture an old spite, ever since the first promise rescued Adam out of his hand,) have taken,—that the Scriptures be declared insufficient and uncertain. Just as Andronicus served the emperor Alexius, who gave out that he was weak and insufficient to govern alone, and so first got a joint power with him, and at last an absolute power over him to dethrone him; and whether their traditions have dealt better by the Scriptures, the world may judge. When traditions go up, the written word is sure to go down: 'Ye have made,' saith Christ to the Pharisees, 'the commandment of none effect by your traditions,' Matt. xv. 6; you have unlorded it, and supplanted its authority in the minds of men, who leave the word to hearken to your traditions.

CHAPTER XIX.

SHEWETH THE GREAT WICKEDNESS OF THOSE WHO LIFT UP THIS SWORD IN DEFENCE OF ANY SIN.

THIS condemns those as prodigiously wicked, who, instead of using this sword to defend themselves against sin and Satan, lift it up audaciously for their defence in their wicked and abominable practices. Thus the heretic takes up the word to justify his corrupt tenets, forcing it, in favour of his way, to bear witness against itself: and many profane wretches we meet with, who, to ward off a reproof, will dare to seek protection for their ungodly courses from the word,

Digitized by Google

which they have at their tongue's end, and interpose to break the blow that is made at them. Tell the sensualist of his voluptuous, brutish life, and you shall have him sometimes reply, Solomon was not so precise and scrupulous, who saith, 'A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat and to drink, and to be merry:' as if Solomon, yea, God himself, that directed his pen, meant to fill the drunkard's quaffing cup for him, and were a friend of gluttons and wine-bibbers: whereas, to eat and drink, and be merry, as Solomon meant there, amounts to no more, than to serve God with gladness in the abundance of those good things which God gives us to enjoy, as Moses says, Deu. xxviii. 47. Such is the desperate wickedness of man's heart, that the sweetest portions of Scripture are wrested by many to serve their lusts. The declarations of God's free grace, made on purpose to melt sinners' hearts, and draw them from their lusts to Christ, how often are they abused to harden them in their sins, and keep them from him! Examples of holy men's fall, recorded merely to make them fear who stand, and to preserve a hope of mercy alive in those that have fallen, whereby they are in danger of being swallowed up with despair,—how are they perverted by many, who lie like beasts wallowing in their own filth, and think all is well, because such eminent saints fell so foully, and yet came off so fairly at last, with their sins pardoned and souls saved! The good success that late repentance hath now and then had in a few, yea, very few Scripture instances, it is strange to think what use and advantage Satan makes of them, to beg time of the sinner, and make him linger still in the midst of his sins. The eleventh hour, saith he, is not yet come; why will ye repent so long before you need? Why should he set out in the morning, who may dispatch his journey well enough an hour before night? The penitent thief, as one saith, stolen to heaven from the cross, hath, I fear, been an occasion, though on God's part an innocent one, to bring many a sinner to the gallows, if not to a place of longer execution in another world. Oh, take heed of this, sinners, as you love your souls! Is it not enough to have your lusts, but you must also fetch your encouragment from the word, and forge God's hand to bear you out? The devil, indeed, thus abuseth Scripture, Matt. iv. 4; thinking thereby to make Christ more readily hearken to his cursed motion: and wilt thou tread in his steps? By this thou makest one sin two, and the last the worst. To be drunk was a fearful sin in Belshazzar; but to quaff in the bowls of the sanctuary was far worse. No sin is little, but the least sin amounts to blasphemy when thou committest it on a Scripture pretence. The devil cannot easily desire a greater occasion of glorying over God, than thus to wound his name with his own sword. When Julian the apostate saw the Gentile philosophers confuted by the human learning of some Christians, he said, We are taken by our own wings; looking upon it as a great disgrace for them to be beaten and worsted at that which they counted their own weapon. The word is the Holy Spirit's sword. Oh, for shame! let not Satan make his boast over thy God, Christian, by thy means, which he will, if he can persuade thee to wound his name with this his own weapon. He that fetcheth an argument from the Holy Scriptures to countenance any corrupt opinion or practice, what doth he but go about to make God fight against himself? He shoots at him with an arrow out of his own quiver. He sins, and then, as it were, says God bid him. If there be a man on the face of the earth, that God will single out as a mark for his utmost wrath, this is he, who shelters his wickedness under the wing of the Holy Scriptures, and so make God the patron of his sin.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EXHORTATION TO THANKFULNESS FOR THE SWORD OF THE WORD, WHEREBY WE ARE ENABLED TO STAND ON OUR DEFENCE AGAINST OUR GREATEST ENEMIES.

First, Let us be excited and provoked to bless God for this sword, with which he hath furnished us so graciously, whereby we may stand on our defence against all our bloody enemies. If a man had a kingdom in his possession, but no sword to keep the crown on his head, he could not expect to enjoy it long. This is a world, that there is no living or holding anything we have in safety, without the help of arms; least of all, could our souls be safe if naked

Digitized by Google

and unarmed, which are here in the mouth of danger, and can no way pass to the place of bliss prepared for them, but through their enemies' quarters. When Israel took their march out of Egypt toward the promised land, few or none would trust them to travel through their country, but all rose up in arms against them. The Christian will find his march much more troublesome and dangerous to heaven: Satan is not grown tamer than he used to be, nor the wicked world better affected to the people of God. O, what a mercy is it, that we have this sword by our side, which puts us out of danger from any of them all! This is in thy hand, Christian, as the rod was in Moses's. What though an army of devils be behind thee, and a sea of sins before, roaring upon thee, with this sword, by faith wielding it, thou mayest cut thy way through the waves of the one, and set thyself out of the reach of the other. Truly, the Scripture is a mercy incomparably greater than the sun in the heavens: that might be better spared out of its orb, than this out of the church. If that were gone, we should be but knocked off our worldly business, and be only in danger of losing our bodily life, by falling in this pit and that pond; but if deprived of the word, the work of salvation would be laid aside, or gone about to little purpose, and our souls must needs miss the right way to happiness, and stumble inevitably upon hell, while we think we are going to heaven, unless a miracle should interpose to prevent it.

But more particularly bless God for three mercies in reference to the Scripture.

SECTION I.—Bless God for the translation of the Scriptures. The word is our sword; by being translated, this sword is drawn out of its scabbard. What use could a poor Christian, that hath but one tongue in his head (that understands but one language I mean, which his mother taught him), make of this sword when presented to him as it is sheathed in Greek and Hebrew? Truly, he might even fall a weeping with John at the sight of the sealed book, because he could not read in it, Rev. v. 4. O bless God, who hath sent men furnished, by the blessing of God on their indefatigable labours and studies, with abilities to roll away the stone from the mouth of this fountain! And were it not sad to see the water of life brought to you with the expense of their spirits and strength, wasted in the work, to be spilled on the ground, and basely undervalued by you, so as hardly to be put in the catalogue of the mercies you praise God for? O, God forbid! It cannot be, if ever you had the sweetness of any one promise in it milked out unto you, or the power of one of its divine truths impressed on your hearts. Melchior Adam tells us that Bugenhagius, whose assistance Luther had, with others, in translating the Bible, when the work was brought to a happy conclusion, was so affected with the incomparable mercy therein to the churches of Christ in Germany, that every year he invited his friends to a solemn feast, the day whereon the work was finished, which they called 'The Feast of the Translation of the Bible.' When Queen Elizabeth, our English Deborah, opened the prisons at her coming to the crown, one piously told her, that there were yet some good men left in prison undelivered, and desired they might also partake of her princely favour, meaning the four Evangelists and Paul, who had been denied to walk abroad in the English tongue when her sister swayed the sceptre. To this she answered, They should be asked, whether they were willing to have their liberty; which soon after appearing, they had their jail-delivery, and have ever since had their liberty to speak to you in your own tongue at the assemblies of your public worship, yea, to visit you in your own private houses also. Now is that happy day come, and long hath been, which holy Mr Tindale told a popish doctor of, when a poor ploughman should be able to read the Scriptures, and allowed as freely to converse with them as any doctor of them all! A blessed day, indeed, it is to the souls of men! Now, Christian, when thou art a prisoner to God's providence, and kept by his afflicting hand at home, thou hast the word of God to bear thee company in thy solitude; and so, though thou canst not sit up with thy brethren and sisters at thy Father's table in his public ordinances, yet thou dost not wholly go without thy meal; thou canst not, it is likely, carve so well for thyself, as the minister used to do for thee, yet it is an incomparable mercy that thou hast liberty to pick up out of the word for thy present counsel and comfort, as thou art enabled to do by the Spirit of God, upon thy humble prayer for his assistance. Admirable hath been

Digitized by Google

the support the saints have found from this holy book in their confinements. God hath graciously ordered it, that the most useful and necessary truths for the afflicted saints, hang on the lower boughs of this tree of life, within the reach of a poor Christian, who is but of an ordinary stature in knowledge. O, think, and think again of those sad times, when the bloody sword of persecutors was drawn to keep off the people of God from coming near this tree, and then you will better conceive your present privilege: yea, look back unto those times of popish ignorance, when this cellar of cordial waters was locked up in the original tongues, and not one in a whole town to be found that had a key by whom poor souls in their fainting fits and agonies of spirit could have it opened, so as to come by any of their sweet consolations to restore their swooning souls, and then you will surely bless God, who hath given you so free an access unto them, when others cannot have access to you to communicate their help unto you.

SECTION II.—Bless God for the ministry of the word, which is the public school he opens to his people, that in it they may learn the use of this their weapon. It is a sad fruit that grows upon the little smattering knowledge that some have got from the word to puff them up with a conceit of their own abilities, so as to despise the ministry of the word as a needless work. The Corinthians were sick of this disease, which the apostle labours to cure by a sharp reproof—'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us,' 1 Cor. iv. 8. Paul, it seems, was nobody now, with these high proficients; the time was, when Paul came to town he was a welcome man; the sucking child was not more glad to see his mother come home, nor could cry more earnestly to be laid to the breast, than they to partake of his ministry; but now, like the child when he hath had his fill, they bite the very breast they so greedily before took into their mouths, as if they should never want another meal: so high did pride carry them above all thoughts of needing his ministry more. And hath not the pride of many in our days carried them as far into a contempt of the ministry of the word, though their knowledge come far short of the Corinthians'? Well, take heed of this sin; Miriam's plague, yea, a worse, a spiritual scab and leprosy, apparently cleaves to those, as close as a girdle to the loins, who come to despise this ordinance, that they make all afraid to come near their tents. What prodigious errors are they left unto, whereby God brands them! Yea, what sensual lusts hath the once forward profession of many among them been quite swallowed up with! If once a man thinks he needs no longer go to the Spirit's school, he shall find that he takes the ready way to deprive himself of the Spirit's teaching at home: 'Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings,' 1 Thess. v. 19, 20. They are coupled together; he that despiseth one, loseth both. If the scholar be too proud to learn of the usher, he is unworthy to be taught by the master. But I turn to you, humble souls, who yet sit at the feet of Jesus in your right minds, speak the truth and lie not; are you not well paid for your pains? Dare you say of your waiting on the ministry of the word, what a wretch, though a learned one, Politianus by name, said of his reading the Scripture, that he never spent time to less purpose? Do you count it among your lost time, and misplaced hours, that are bestowed on hearing the word? I trow not. Thou keepest thy acquaintance with the word at home, if thou be a Christian, and eatest many a sweet in a bitter corner, while thou art secretly meditating thereon; but does this content thee, or make thee think the word preached a superfluous meal? I am sure David knew how to improve his solitary hours as well as another; yet, in his banishment, O how he was pinched and hunger-bitten for want of the public ordinance! And surely we cannot think he forgot to carry his Bible with him into the wilderness, loving the word so dearly as he did: 'My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is,' Psalm lxiii. 1. Why David, what is the reason thou complainest thus? Hast thou not the word to read in secret? Canst thou not let down thy bucket, and by meditation draw what thou wilt out of the well of the word? Why then dost thou say thou art in a thirsty land, where no water is? He means, therefore, comparatively; the sweetest refreshings he enjoyed in his private converse with the word were not comparable to what he had met in public. And can you blame a sick child for desiring to sit with his burden at his father's table, though he is not forgot in his chamber where he is a prisoner? It was the sanctuary, there to

Digitized by Google

see God, his power and glory, as of old, that David's heart longed for, and could not well live without. God threatens to bring a famine of hearing the word, Amos viii. 11. Mark, not a famine of reading the word, but of hearing the word. If the word be not preached, though we have the Bible to read at home, yet it is a famine, and so we ought to judge it. 'The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision,' 1 Sam. iii. 1. The strongest Christians would find a want of this ordinance in time. We see in a town besieged, though it be well laid in with corn, yet when put to grind with private hand-mills, what straits they are soon put to. And so will the best grown saints, when they come to have no more from the word for their souls to live on than what they grind with their own private meditation and labour,—then they will miss the minister, and see it was mercy indeed to have one whose office it was to grind all the week for him. And if the stronger Christian cannot spare this office, because yet not perfect, what shift shall the weaker sort make, who need the minister to divide the word, as much as little children their nurse's help to mince their meat, and cut their bread for them! To leave them to their own improving of the word, is to set a whole loaf among a company of little babes, and bid them help themselves: alas! they will sooner cut their fingers with the knife than fill their stomachs with the bread.

SECTION III.—Bless God for the efficacy of the word upon thy soul. Did ever its point prick thy heart,—its edge fetch blood of thy lusts? Bless God for it; you would do as much to a surgeon for lancing a sore, and severing a putrified part from thy body, though he put thee to exquisite torture in the doing of it. And I hope thou thinkest God hath done thee a greater kindness. Solomon tells us,—'Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful,' Prov. xxvii. 6. The wounds that God thus gives are the faithful wounds of a friend; and the kisses which sin gives come from an enemy. God's wounds cure,—sin's kisses kill.' The Italians say, that 'play, wine, and women, consume a man laughing.' It is true of all pleasurable sins; and as sin kills the sinner laughing, so God saves poor souls weeping and bleeding under the wounds which his word gives them. Happy soul, who hast made such an exchange, to get out of the enchanting arms of thy lusts that would have kissed thee to death, and to fall into the hands of a faithful God, who means thee no more hurt by all the blood he draws from thee than the saving of thy soul. How far mightest thou have gone, and not met with such a friend! There is not another sword like this in all the world, that can cure with cutting; not another arm could use this sword, to have done thus with it, besides the Spirit of God. The axe does nothing till the hand of the workman lifts it up; may be no one else can use his tools as he himself can. None could do such feats with Scanderberg's sword as himself. None can pierce the conscience, wound the spirit, and hew down the lusts which there lie skulking in their fastnesses, but God himself; and this he doth not for every one that reads and hears it, which still heightens his mercy toward thee. There were many widows in Israel when God sent his prophet to her of Zarepta. And why to her? Was there never a drunkard, swearer, or unbeliever beside thee in the congregation at the same time that God armed his word to smite thee and graciously to prick thy heart? Oh cry out in admiration of this distinguished mercy, Lord, how is it thou wilt manifest thyself to me, and not unto the world!

CHAPTER XXI.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE STUDY OF THE WORD.

SECONDLY, Let this provoke you to the study of the word, that you may thereby have a familiar acquaintance with it. For this the Bereans obtained a mark of honour as more noble than others, because 'they searched the Scriptures,' Acts xvii. 11. Shall God leave but one book to his church's care and study, and shall it not be read? Shall we be told there is so rich a treasure laid up in this mine, and we continue so beggarly in our knowledge, rather than take a little pains by digging in it to come by it? The canker and rust of our gold and silver, which is got with harder labour than is required here, will rise up in judgment against many, and say, You could drudge and trudge for us that are now turned to rust and dust, but could walk over the field of the word, where

Digitized by Google

an incorruptible treasure lay, and would lose it rather than your sloth! Oh in what breast doth the ancient zeal of former saints to the word lodge! Have they not counted it above rubies? Have they not travelled over sea and land to get the sight of it?—given the money out of their purse, the coat off their backs, to purchase a few leaves of it, and parted with their blood out of their veins, rather than forego the treasure which they found in it? And is the market now fallen so low that thou desirest not acquaintance with it, when it is offered at a far lower rate? Either they must be charged for fools, to buy the knowledge of it so dear, or you that refuse it, who may have it so cheap. But lest you should think I set you upon a needless work, you are to understand there is an indispensable necessity of Scripture knowledge. First, We are commanded to 'search the Scriptures,' John v. 39. Indeed, were there not such an express word for this duty, yet the very penning of them, with the end for which they are written considered, would impose the duty upon us. When a law is enacted by a state, the very promulgation of it is enough to oblige the people to take notice of it. Neither will it serve a subject's turn that breaks this law, to say he was ignorant of any such law being in force; the publication of it bound him to inquire after it. What other end have lawgivers in divulging their acts, but that their people might know their duty? Christ fastens condemnation on the ignorance of men where means for knowledge are afforded: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness,' John iii. 19. They will not know the rule, because they have no mind to walk by it. Now, if ignorance of the word be condemned where its light shines, then surely he commands us to open our eyes, whereby we may let in the knowledge it sheds forth; for a law must be transgressed before a condemning sentence be pronounced. It is the heathen that shall be judged without the written word; but thou, who livest within its sound, shalt be judged by it, whether thou wilt know it or not, 2 Thess. i. 8. And if thou shalt be judged by it, then surely thou art bound to be instructed by it. The Jews once had the word deposited in their hands: unto them were committed the oracles of God; and do you think they had well discharged their trust by locking them up safely in the ark, and never looking into them? Surely you cannot but think God intended another place, even their own breasts, where he principally would have them kept. They were committed to them, and now to us, as a dying father doth his will and testament to his son whom he makes his executor, not to throw it aside among his waste papers, but carefully and curiously to read and observe it, that thereby nothing therein contained might be left unperformed. It is called 'the faith which was delivered to the saints,' Jude 3; that is, delivered to their study and care. If any of us had lived when Christ was here in the flesh, and he when taking his farewell of the world) should have left to us some one thing in special charge to be done for his sake after he was gone to heaven, would we not religiously have performed the will of our dying Saviour, as did John, to whom he left the care of his mother, who, therefore, took her home to his own house? Behold here a greater charge deposited in his saints' hands;—'The faith once delivered to them;' that is, once for all, to be by them kept and transmitted from one generation to another, while this world lasts; so that if thou takest thyself to be a saint, thou art concerned with the rest to take it home with thee, and see that it dwells in thee richly, as becomes such a guest bequeathed by so dear a friend. Secondly, It is necessary: the word contains the whole counsel of God, for the bringing poor sinners to eternal life. If you will not search the Scriptures, and sit here at the feet of the Spirit (who fits his scholars for heaven by this one book,) where wilt thou meet another master? In whose works else wilt thou find the words of eternal life? Apollos was a man mighty in the Scriptures, and it is said, that 'Aquila and Priscilla expounded to him the way of God more perfectly,' Acts xviii. 26. An exposition presupposeth a text. The meaning is, they opened the Scriptures more perfectly to him. This is the way of God to lead us to God; yea, the only way. In other journeys we may miss the right way, and yet come at last to the place we intended, though not so soon; but no way will bring us to God, but this of the word; neither can we walk in this way of God, if we be ignorant of it. A man may, in other journeys, be in his right way, without knowing it, and he may come safe home: but we can have no benefit from this way of God, if wholly

Digitized by Google

ignorant of it, because we can do nothing in faith. Labour, therefore, to study this book, though thou be a dunce in all besides! What is it thou wouldst learn? Is it the true knowledge of God? Thou mayest tumble over all the philosophers that ever wrote, and when thou hast done, not be able to frame a right notion of him. The best of them all were but brutish in their highest knowledge of God. Indeed, God left the wise world to run into a thousand follies and vanities, while they were, by their own wisdom, shaping a religion to themselves, that, having proved them dunces, he might send them and the whole world to learn this lesson in another school, and that is the ministry of the gospel, which is nought else but the explication of the word; 1 Cor. i. 21, 'After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' Wouldst thou come to the true knowledge of sin? This also is to be found nowhere else; the Scripture alone dissects the whole body of sin, and reads to us a perfect anatomical lecture upon its most minute and secret parts; this discovers the ulcers of our wicked hearts, which thousands die of, and, through ignorance of the Scriptures, can never come to know what their disease is. If lust comes not out in spots and sores, to be seen in the outward conversation, the philosopher pronounceth him a clean man. The plague of the heart, though an old disease, and epidemical, yet never was found out, or treated of, but by this sacred book; and this doth it fully, yea, acquaints us where and from whom we got this infection; even from Adam, by whom, the world was tainted, and turned into a pest-house. Which of the wise ones of the world ever dreamed of this genealogy? Poor man, till the Scripture informs him of this, lies in the pit of sin, and knows not who threw him in. In a word, wouldst thou be helped out? Thou must then be beholden to the Scripture to do this kind office for thee. Thy own cordage is too short to reach, and too weak to draw thee thence. If thou takest not hold of this cord of love, which God lets down unto thee in his word, thy case is desperate. And now, having set life and death before thee, I leave thee to thy choice. If yet thou be resolved to reject the knowledge of the Almighty, and allow thy soul to launch into eternity without this chart to direct thee, not caring at what port thou arrivest in the other world, heaven or hell: then prepare to take up thy lodgings among the damned, and harden thy stout heart, if thou canst, against those endless flames which are kindled for all those that know not God, and obey not his gospel, 2 Thess. i. 8: and to thy terror know, that in spite of thy now wilful ignorance, thou shalt one day understand the Scriptures to the increase of thy torment; here thou shuttest out their light, but then it will shine full on thy face, when it would give thee some ease, if thou couldst forget that ever thou didst hear of such a book as the Bible; but then, against thy will, thou shalt carry the remembrance thereof to hell with thee, that thy scornful neglect of it on earth may be continually pouring out new horror, as so much fire and brimstone, into thy guilty conscience. How must it then fill thee with amazement, to think of thy folly and madness, to sell thy soul for a little ease and sloth! Hell from beneath will be moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming thither; it will stir up the dead for thee, and the poor heathens whom thou shalt find prisoners there will come flocking about thee, and reproach thee, saying, Art thou become like unto us? Thou hast perished for thy ignorance, who hadst the key of knowledge at thy girdle, and at so easy a rate mightest have been instructed in the way of life: we, poor heathens, cannot bring an action against God for false imprisonment, though we never heard of such a thing as the gospel, for we did not walk up to our little light, and might have known more of God, had we not darkened our own foolish minds by rebelling against the light we had; but we were never at such pains to lose our souls as you, who have rejected the word of God, and broke through all the threatenings and promises thereof, to come hither.

CHAPTER XXII.

SEVERAL CARNAL SHIFTS AND OBJECTIONS, THAT SOME BRING TO EXCUSE THEM FROM THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES, REMOVED.

But you will say, If we had so much time to spare as others, we would not be so unacquainted with the Scriptures: but, alas! our hands are so full with

Digitized by Google

our worldly callings, that we hope God will excuse us, though we have not so much knowledge of his word as others.

SECTION I.—Is this the plea that thou meanest to use when thou comest to the bar, and are called to give thy answer to Christ, thy judge, upon this matter? Does not thy heart quake within thy breast, to think how he will knit his brow, and throw this thy apology, with disdain and wrath, upon thy face? Did so much anger sit on the countenance of meek Jesus when on earth, and such a dreadful doom proceed from his sweet lips against those that made their farms and oxen an excuse for not coming to his supper, sentencing them never to taste thereof? Oh, what then will glorious Christ say, when mounted on his tribunal, not to invite, but to judge sinners, to such an excuse as this! Could God find heart and time to pen and send this love-letter to thee, and thou find none to read and peruse it! The sick man no time to look on his physician's bill! The condemned malefactor to look on his prince's letter of grace, wherein a pardon is signed! Poor wretch, must the world have all thy time, and swallow thee up alive! a curse not less than that of Korah. Art thou such a slave to thy pelf, as to tie thy soul to thy purse-strings; and take no more time for the saving of it, than this cruel master will afford thee! Thou and thy money perish with thee! His soul is in a bad state, which hath its allowance from so base a lust: this is so far from mending the matter, that thou dost but cover one sin with another. Who gave thee leave thus to overlade thyself with the incumbrance of the world? Is not God the Lord of thy time? Is it not given by him to be laid out for him? He allows thee, indeed a fair portion thereof for the lower employments of this life, but did he ever intend to turn himself out of all? This is as if the mariners, who are allowed by the merchant some small adventure for themselves, should fill the ship, and leave no stowage for his goods; will it suffice them to say there is no room left for his commodities? Or a servant, when his master asks why he neglected such a business committed to his care for despatch, should answer that he was drunk, and therefore could not do it. Why did you not read my word, and meditate thereon? will Christ say at that day. Darest thou, then, be so impudent as to say, Lord, I was overcharged with the cares, and drunk with the love of the world, and, therefore, I could not! Well, if this be the thief that robs thee of thy time, get out of his hands, lest it also rob thee of thy soul. The devil can desire no greater advantage against thee; he may better boast over thee, than Pharaoh could over Israel,—He is entangled, he is entangled, in the wilderness of the world, and shall not escape my hands! If a friend should tell you that you kept so many servants as would beggar you, would you not listen to his counsel, and rather turn them out of doors, than keep them? And wilt thou not be as careful of thy soul? Wilt thou keep such a rout of worldly occasions, as will eat up all thoughts of God and heaven? Certainly, thou must either discharge thyself of these, or dismiss thy hope of salvation. This ordinarily is but a cover to men's sloth: if they had hearts, they would find time to converse with the word in the greatest throng of their worldly occasions. These can find time to eat and sleep, to sport and recreate themselves, but no time for God and his word; would they but allow their souls those spare ends of time to search the Scripture, which they spend in pastimes, idle visits, reading of empty pamphlets, it would not be long before they might give a happy account of their proficiency in their spiritual knowledge. What calling more encumbering than a soldier's, and, of all soldiers, the general's, to whom all resort? Such an one was Joshua, yet he had a strict command given him to study the Scriptures: Josh. i. 8, 'This book shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.' Must Joshua, in the midst of drums and trumpets, and distractions of war, find time to meditate on the law of God, and shall a few trivial occasions in thy private calling discharge thee from the same duty? Dost thou think that the closet is such an enemy to thy shop, and the time spent with God a thief to thy temporal estate? God, I am sure, intends his people better, as appears in the former place,—'Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'

SECTION II.—But I cannot read; how, therefore, can I search the Scriptures? It is sad, I confess, that parents, who are God's trustees, to whom the nurture of their children is committed, should take no more care for their souls than the

Digitized by Google

ostrich doth of her eggs, not caring what becomes of them. What do these but throw them into the devil's mouth, by sending them out into a sinful world without the knowledge of God and his word, to become a prey to every lust! To hell thou must needs go, if God shews no more pity to them than their parents have done. But shall thy parents' negligence be a plea for thy ignorance? Wilt not thou be merciful to thyself, because they were cruel? In the fear of God be persuaded to supply their defect by thy diligence. I hope thou dost not think it a shame to learn that, now thou art old, which thou shouldst have been taught when thou wert young. Had not thy parents learned thee a trade to get thy temporal living, wouldst thou therefore have lived a beggar rather than have applied thyself, though late, to some calling? There are many, for thy encouragement, who have begun late, and by God's blessing on their diligence, have conquered the difficulty of the work. If thou wert in prison, thou hadst rather learn to read a verse than lose thy life for want thereof. Now, though ability to read the word be not of absolute necessity for the salvation of thy soul, yet knowledge of its saving truths is, and there are few better private means to obtain this than reading: but if thou be not capable of this, thou hast not by it an excuse for thy ignorance so long as thou hast an ear to receive instruction from others. As God sometimes recompenses the defect of one sense with the quickness of another, so may be thou shalt find thy inability to read supplied by a retentive memory to hold what thou hearest read or preached unto thee. Some martyrs we find mighty in the Scriptures, able to defend the truth against learned doctors, and yet not book-learned. One who could not read, yet carried always some part of the Scripture about him, and when he met any Christian that could, he would get him to read some portion or other thereof unto him, whereby he attained to such a measure of knowledge and faith as made him wiser than his enemies, and a stout champion for the truth, even to resist to blood.

Section III.—Oh, but, saith a third, though I can read, yet I am of so weak an understanding that I fear I shall make no work with such deep mysteries as are there contained. Take heed this objection comes not from thy sluggish heart, which gets this fair pretence to ease thee of a duty thou fearest will be troublesome unto thee. Didst thou ever make a trial, and set about the work, conscientiously using all means that might conduce towards thy instruction in the mind of God? If not, lay not the blame on thy weak head, but wicked heart. When thou went first to be an apprentice, what skill hadst thou in thy trade? Didst thou therefore despair and run away? No, but by thy diligence learnt the mystery of it in a few years, so as to maintain thyself comfortably; and will not thy industry to learn that condemn thy sloth in not studying the word, which is able to bring in a better livelihood to thy soul than thy trade for thy body? But, poor soul, if what thou sayest indeed ariseth from the deep sense thou hast of thy own weakness, then ponder upon this twofold encouragement. First, God is able to interpret his own word unto thee: indeed, none can enter into the knowledge thereof without being beholden unto his Spirit to unlock the door. If thou hadst a riper head and higher parts than thou canst now pretend to, thou wouldst, without his help, be but like the blind Sodomites about Lot's house, groping, but not able to find the way into the true saving knowledge thereof. He that hath not the right key is as far from entering the house as he that hath none, yea, in some sense, farther off; for he that hath none will call to him that is within, while the other, trusting to his false key, endeavours to get in, but to no purpose. The Pharisees, who were so conversant in the Scriptures, and obtained the name for the admired doctors of the chair, called, 1 Cor. ii. 8, 'the princes of the world,' because so renowned and adored among the people; yet even these missed that truth which lay before them almost in every leaf of Moses and the prophets, whom they were in their every-day's study tumbling over; I mean that grand truth concerning Christ, of whom both Moses and the prophets speak. And at the same time the people, whom they counted so base, yea, accursed as those that understood not the law, could see him whom they missed. There are none so knowing that God cannot blind; none so blind and ignorant whose eyes his Spirit cannot open. He who, by his incubation upon the waters at the creation, hatched that rude mass into the beautiful form we now see, and out of that

Digitized by Google

dark chaos made the glorious heavens, and garnished them with so many orient stars, can move upon thy dark soul, and enlighten it, though now it be as void of knowledge as the evening of the world's first day was of light. The schoolmaster sometimes sends home the child, and bids his father to put him to another trade, because not able, with all his art to make a scholar of him: but if the Spirit of God be the master, thou shalt learn, though a dunce: Psalm cxix. 130, 'The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.' No sooner is the soul entered into the Spirit's school, than he becomes a proficient: thence we are commanded to encourage those that discourage themselves: Isaiah xxxv. 3, 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.' Why? What good news shall we tell them? 'The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped,' verse 5: 'An highway shall be there—and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools shall not err therein,' verse 8. Secondly, The deeper sense thou hast of thy own weakness, the more fit thou art for the Spirit's teaching. A proud scholar and a humble master will never agree: Christ is humble and lowly, and so resists the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Though he cannot brook him that is proud, yet he can bear with thee who art weak and dull if humble and diligent; as we may see in the disciples, whom our Saviour did not disdain to teach the same lesson over and over again, till at last they say, 'Lo! now speakest thou plainly,' John xvi. 29. The eunuch was no great scholar, when in his chariot he was reading Isaiah's prophecy; yet, because he did it with an honest heart, Philip is despatched to instruct him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONTAINETH FOUR DIRECTIONS TO THE CHRISTIAN IN THE USE OF THIS SWORD FOR HIS DEFENCE AGAINST THE FIRST ENEMY, THE PERSECUTOR.

But some may say, You have said enough to let us know how necessary a weapon this sword is to defend our souls, and of what admirable use it is in all the conflicts that the Christian hath with any of his enemies; but we hope you will not leave us thus: it is a word of counsel we now listen to hear from you, how we, poor Christians, may use this sword for our own defence and the vanquishing of the several enemies whose approach you have taught us to expect; some whereof we already, to our great terror, see in the field against us, and how soon the other may appear we know not. What good will a sword by our side, a Bible in our hand, yea, mouth do us, if we be not instructed how we may ward off their blows, and make them feel the impressions of ours therewith? For your better satisfaction, I shall sort the directions to the several kinds of enemies you have to grapple with; for their assaults being of a different nature, require a resistance suitable to their way of fight.

Section I.—To begin with the persecutor. Now, wouldst thou, Christian, stand the shock of his furious assault when he hangs out his bloody flag, breathing slaughter to the church and flock of Christ, if they will not let him trample upon all their glory by defiling their consciences and renouncing the faith at the lust of his imperious command, then let it be thy first care to get scripture grounds for those principles and practices which stir up the persecutor's rage against thee. A man had need be well assured of that which brings his life and dear enjoyments into hazard. It is enough to weaken the courage of a valiant men to fight in a mist when he cannot well discern his foes from his friends: and to be a damp upon the Christian's spirit in a suffering hour, if he be not clear in his judgment, and fixed in his principles. Look, therefore, to put that out of question in thy own thoughts, for which the persecutor calls thee into question; and the rather, because it ever was, and still will be, the policy of persecutors, to disfigure as much as they can the beautiful face of those truths and practices for which the servants of Christ suffer, that they may put a colour of justice upon their bloody cruelties, and make the world believe they suffer as evil-doers. Now thou wilt never be able to bear up under the weight of this their heavy charge, except thou be fully persuaded in thy own conscience, that thou sufferest for righteousness' sake. But if thou standest clear in thy own thoughts concerning thy cause, thou wilt easily wipe

Digitized by Google

off the dirt they throw upon thee, and sweetly entertain thyself with the comfort which thy own conscience will bring to thee through the reproaches of thy enemies. Salvian saith, What others say or think of us, makes us not miserable: one reproof from a man's own thoughts, wounds more than the reproaches of all the world besides. When the Thessalonians were once satisfied of the certain truth of Paul's doctrine,—'For the gospel,' it is said, 'came to them in much assurance,' 1 Thess. i. 5,—then they could open their door with joy to receive it, though afflictions and persecutions come along with it; ver. 6.

Section II.—Improve those scriptures which teach us to dread God more, and fear man less. Every man is most loth to fall into his hands whom he fears most; so that if God hath once gained the supremacy of thy fear, thou wilt rather leap into the hottest fire the persecutor can make, than make God thy enemy: 'Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of thy word,' Psa. cxix. 161. David had put, it seems, man's wrath, and that which God threatens in his word, into the scales, and finding God's hand to be the heavier, trembles at that, and ventures the worst that the other can do against him. Hence it is the Scripture is so much in depressing the power of man, that we may not be scared at his big look or threats, and representing his utmost rage to be so contemptible and inconsiderable a thing, as none that knows who God is, needs fear the worst he can do; 'Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?' Isa. ii. 22. 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell,' Matt. x. 28. Children are afraid of bugbears, that cannot hurt them; but they can play with fire that will burn them; and no less childish is it to be frightened into a sin at the frowns of a man, who comes forth with a vizard of seeming dread and terror, but hath no power to hurt us more than our own fear gives him; and to play with hell-fire into which God is able to cast us for ever. Truly, this is to be scared with painted fire in the picture, and not in the furnace, where it really burns. What was John Huss the worse for his fool's cap that his enemies put on his head, so long as under it he had a helmet of hope, which they could not take off? Or how much the nearer hell was the same blessed martyr for their committing his soul to the devil? No nearer than some of their own wicked crew are to heaven, for being sainted in the Pope's Calendar. Melancthon said some are *Anathema secundum dici*, as Luther, and other faithful servants of Christ, whom the pope cursed. But what saith David? 'Let them curse, but bless thou,' Psa. cix. 28. He that hath God's good word, needs not fear the world's bad; nor need change his countenance for the rage of his persecutors.

Section III.—Be sure thou givest up thy lust to the sword of the Spirit, before thy life is in danger from the sword of the persecutor. He is not likely to be free of his flesh for Christ, when called to suffer at man's hand that is dainty of his lusts, and cannot bear the edge of the Spirit's sword when he comes to mortify them. Canst thou be willing to lay down thy life for Christ, and yet keep an enemy in thy bosom out of the hand of justice, that seeks to take away the life of Christ? Persecutors tempt, as well as torture. They promise the honours of the court, as well as threaten the hardships of the prison, and cruelty of the devouring fire. Now, if thy love to the world be not mortified, it is easy to tell what choice thou wilt make,—even as Demas did, thou wilt embrace the present world, and leave Christ. Or if thou shouldst, through a natural stoutness, bear up under sufferings, even to give thy body to be burnt, rather than renounce the true religion thou professest, yet if any lust should at last be found to have been fostered by thee, thou shalt have no more thanks at Christ's hands than he who in the law offered up an unclean beast to God. It is possible for one to die in the cause of Christ, and not be his martyr. Thy heart must be holy which thou sufferest with, as well as the cause thou sufferest for. Thy behaviour must be gracious in suffering, as well as the cause just, that brings thee to suffer. He alone is Christ's martyr, that suffers for Christ, as Christ himself suffered: for he hath not only left us his truth to maintain unto blood, when called thereunto, by his example, but to follow also in our sufferings,—'If, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered

Digitized by Google

for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not,' &c., 1 Pet. ii. 20, 21, 23. This is hard work indeed, in the very fire to keep the spirits cool, and clear of wrath and revenge, toward those that throw him so unmercifully into the devouring flames! But it makes him that by grace can do it, a glorious conqueror. Flesh and blood would bid a man call for fire from heaven, rather than mercy to fall upon them that so cruelly handle him. He that can forgive his enemy is too hard for him, and hath the better of him; because his enemy's blows do but bruise his flesh, but the wounds that love gives, pierce the conscience. Saul was forced to confess that David, persecuted so furiously by him, was the better man,—'Thou art more righteous than I,' 1 Sam. xxiv. 17. And the people went from the execution of Christ, whom they were so mad to have crucified, sick of what they had done, shaking their heads, as if all were not right they had done against so good a man, Luke xxiii. 48. Now when two contrary elements are in a contest, that overcomes which preserves its own nature, and turns the other into some likeness unto itself, as we see fire transfuseth its own heat into the water, forcing it to assimilate and yield to it. Thus a holy, charitable spirit, by forgiving an enemy, if it doth not prevail to turn his enemy's heart to him in love, yet it turns his enemy's conscience against himself, and forceth him to condemn himself, and justify him whom he persecutes wrongfully.

Section IV.—Fortify thy faith on those promises which have an especial respect to such a condition. This is the saints' victory over the world, even their faith. Thus David, when Saul seemed to have him under his foot, and had driven him from living in a court, to dwell for safety in a cave of the wilderness, yet by faith he triumphed over his proud enemy, and sung as pleasantly in his retreat, as the merriest bird in the wood, 'My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.' Saul had his body higher fed, but not his heart fixed, as David's was; and therefore could not sing to David's tune. A thousand thoughts and fears distracted his head and heart, while David lived without fear and care, even when his enemies were in the field hunting for his life. Faith on the promise will, like the widow's oil, not only set thee out of debt to all worldly fears and cares which by thy troubles thou mayest contract, but afford thee enough to live comfortably, yea, with joy unspeakable and glorious.

There are two sorts of sorrow that usually distress gracious souls most in their sufferings for Christ. First, They are prone to be troubled for their own persons and private affairs. Secondly, For the cause of Christ which they bear testimony unto, lest that should miscarry.

Now there is abundant provision laid up in the promises to ease the Christian's heart of both these burdens. First, Acquaint thyself with those promises that concern thyself as a sufferer for Christ, and see where any crevice is left unstopped, if thou canst, that may let in the least air of suspicion into thy mind, to disturb thy peace, and discompose thy joy. The promises are so many, and fitted so exactly to every particular query of which the soul can desire satisfaction, that it will require thy study and diligence to gather them: God having chosen rather to scatter his promises here and there promiscuously, than to sort them, and set every kind in a distinct knot by themselves, we may think, on purpose, that we might be drawn into an acquaintance with the whole Scripture, and not leave any one corner unsearched, but curiously observe it from one end to the other. And let not the present peace of the church cause thee to think it needless work. The apothecary gathers his simples in summer, which haply he may not use till winter; and how soon persecution may arise, thou knowest not. The church ever hath had, and shall have its vicissitudes of summer and winter; yea, sometimes winter strikes in before it is looked for, and then who is the man most likely to be offended? surely he that received the word with joy in the prosperous estate of the church, but laid not in for foul weather. Well, what is thy fear? Whence comes thy discouragement? Art thou scared with the noisomeness of the prison; or doth the terror of the fire, and torture of the rack affright thee? Know, for thy comfort, if thy strength be too weak to carry thee through them, thou shalt never be called to such hard work. The promise assures thee as much,—'He will not suffer thee to be tempted above what thou art able,' 1 Cor. x. 12. God, who gives the husband-

Digitized by Google

man his discretion with what instrument to thresh his corn, as it is harder or softer, will not let the persecutor's wheel come upon thee who art not able to bear it. God gives us this very account why he led his people the farther way about, at their coming out of Egypt, rather than by the land of the Philistines, (the far shorter cut), Exod. xiii. 17, 'For God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and return to Egypt.' See here, God considers their weakness: they cannot yet bear war, and therefore they shall not be tried with it till more hardened for it. But if thou be called into the field, to encounter with these fiery trials, the promise takes the whole care and charge of the war off thy hands: 'When they deliver you up, take no thought' (that is, disquieting, distrustful), 'how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,' Matt. x. 17; and verse 20: 'It is the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.' There is no mouth that God cannot make eloquent; no back so weak, which he cannot make strong. And he hath promised to be with thee wherever thy enemies carry thee: fire and water shall not part thee from his sweet company. These promises make so soft a pillow for the saints' heads, that they have professed never to have lain at more ease than when most cruelly handled by their merciless enemies. One dates his letter 'from the delectable orchard, his prison;' another subscribes herself, 'Your loving friend, as merry as one bound for heaven.' They have been so far from pitying themselves in their sufferings, that their chief sorrow hath been that they could be no more thankful for them. And whence had they their strength and joy? Had they not both from the Spirit, applying the promises to them? Secondly, As for the trouble thou puttest thyself to, concerning the cause and church of Christ, which thou mayest see at any time distressed by the enemy, though God takes thy good-will to them (from which thy fears arise) very kindly, yet there is no need of tormenting thyself with that which is sure never to come to pass. The ark may shake, but it cannot fall; the ship of the church may be tossed, but it cannot sink, for Christ is in it, and will awake time enough to prevent its wreck. There is therefore no cause for us, when the storm beateth hardest upon it, to disturb him, as once the disciples did, with the shrieks and outcries of our unbelief, as if all were lost. Our faith is more in danger of sinking at such a time, than the cause and church of Christ. They are both by the promise set out of the reach of men and devils: the gospel is an 'everlasting gospel,' Rev. xiv. 6: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot of this shall perish,' Matt. v. 18: 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever,' 1 Pet. i. 23; and shall be alive to walk over all its enemies' graves, yea, to see the funeral of the whole world, when, at the great day of the Lord, it must be everlastingly buried in its own ruins. And for the church, that is built upon a rock impregnable, 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,' Matt. xvi. 18. It hath been often in the sea, but never drowned; seldom out of the fire, but never consumed: sometimes swallowed up by treason, but, like Jonah in the whale's belly, cast up again, as too heavy a charge for the strongest stomach that ever a persecutor had to digest. The faith of this hath carried the blessed martyrs to the grave, when they swam to it in their own blood with joy, because they knew the church should have the day at last, and that they left others behind in pursuit of the victory on earth, while themselves were taken out of the field, to triumph in heaven; yea some, by prophetic spirit, have foretold the very time when the persecuted truths, that were then buried with so much ignominy and scorn, should have a happy resurrection and victory over their proud enemies. Thus John Huss cited his enemies to answer him a hundred years after, comforting himself, that though they then burnt 'the goose' (alluding to his own name), 'a swan' would come in his stead, that should fill the air with his sweet singing, which was fulfilled in Luther, whose doctrine went far and near, and charmed the hearts of multitudes. And Hiltenius alleviated the miseries he endured in his stinking prison (where he died for rubbing the monks' sores too hard) with this, that another, naming the very time, 1516, should rise after him that would ruin the monks' kingdom, whose abuses he had but gently reproved, and that they should not be able to resist his power, nor so much as fasten a chain upon him; which came to pass in Luther; for to a miracle he was kept out of the hands of his enemies, though never man's blood was more thirsted for.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV.

DIRECTIONS TO THE CHRISTIAN, HOW TO MAKE USE OF THE SWORD OF THE WORD FOR HIS DEFENCE AGAINST ERRORS AND SEDUCERS.

THE second enemy that comes forth against the Christian is the heretic, who is so much more to be feared than the former, by how much it is worse to part with God's truth than our own life; to be corrupted in our minds than to be tortured in our members; to have our souls damned by God, than our bodies killed by man. If the martyrs had feared death more than heresy, they would not have leaped into the persecutors' flames, rather than consent unto their doctrine. Now that thou may be able to lift up this sword of the Spirit (the only weapon to defend thee) with victory against this dangerous enemy, apply thyself in the use of the best means, with thy utmost care, to find out the true sense and meaning of the Spirit in his word. This sword in another's hand will not defend thee; no, it must be in thy own, or else thou canst not have the benefit of it. The phrase and outward expression are but the shell, the sense and meaning is the pearl, which thou, as a wise merchant, should seek for. To tumble over a chapter, and not to reach the mind of God therein, and to mumble over a prayer in an unknown tongue, are both alike. 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,' Rev. ii. 7. We are to listen what the Spirit saith in the word as we hear or read it; and he that hath an ear for the Spirit will not have an ear for the seducer.

SECTION I.—Take heed thou comest not to the Scriptures with an unholy heart. If ever you know the mind of God in his word, the Spirit must impart it to you. And will he that is so holy take thee by thy foul hand, to lead thee into truth? No, thy doom is set, Dan. xii. 10: 'The wicked shall not understand.' The angel who took Lot's daughter into the house, smote the Sodomites with blindness, that they might grope for the door, and not find it; and so are those likely to be served that come with unclean hearts to the word. 'Without are dogs.' Not only without heaven at last, but without the true knowledge of God on earth. The wicked have the word of God, but the holy soul hath the mind of Christ, 1 Cor. ii. 16. Therefore the apostle exhorts that we 'be not confirmed to this present world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, that acceptable and perfect will of God,' Rom. xii. 2. And what amounts this to, but if we will have truth for our guest, and be acquainted with the mind and will of God, we must have a holy heart for its lodging! They commonly are taken captives by seducers who were before prisoners to their lust, 2 Tim. iii. 6, 7: 'And lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.' When David begs understanding in the word, he makes his purpose for a holy life the argument with which he urgeth God: 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart,' Psa. cxix. 33, 34.

SECTION II.—Make not thy own reason the rule by which thou measurest scripture truths. Is that fit to try the revelation of the word by, which is puzzled with so many secrets in nature? Doth not the word reveal such things to us as are not only above sense, 'for eye hath not seen them, nor ear heard them,' but also above reason? being such as 'never entered into the heart of man,' 1 Cor. ii. 9. Indeed, the whole system of gospel truths speaks in a foreign tongue to reason; it can make no sense of them, except faith be the interpreter. The Scriptures are like the Red Sea, through which the Israelites by faith passed safely, but the Egyptians attempting to do it, for want of that guide, were drowned. A humble believer passeth through the deep mysteries of the word safely, without plunging into any dangerous mistakes; whereas those sons of pride, who leave faith, and take reason for their guide, are drowned in many damnable errors,—Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, &c. The most dangerous errors fathered upon the Scriptures have sprung from this womb. This was the Sadducees' ground on which they went, for their denying the resurrection of the dead. They owned the books of Moses for the word of God, and yet denied the resurrection asserted therein, because it

Digitized by Google

seemed so impossible to their reason, that our bodies, after so many alterations into slime and dust, should stand up in life: this their reason laughed at; for so our Saviour's answer shows, Matt. xxii. 29, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.'

SECTION III.—When thou consultest with the word, take heed thou comest not with a judgment pre-engaged to any opinion. He is not likely to hold the scales evenly whose judgment is bribed beforehand. A distempered eye sees the object of that colour with which itself is affected; and a mind prepossessed will be ready to impose its own sense upon the word, and so lose the truth by an over-conceit of his own opinion. Too many read the Scriptures, not so much to be informed by them as confirmed in what already they have taken up. They choose opinions, as Samson his wife, because they please them, and then come to gain the Scripture's consent. Thus the Jews first made up the match with their idols, and then ask counsel of God what they should do, Ezek. xiv. 4. It is a just judgment of God that such should not see truth when it lies before them, but be given up to an injudicious heart, to believe the word favours their fancies: ver. 4, 5, 'I the Lord will answer him according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart.' And when is a man taken in his own heart, but when ensnared in the fancies and follies which his erroneous mind hath woven?

SECTION IV.—Go to God by prayer for a key to unlock the mysteries of his word. It is not the plodding, but the praying soul, that will get this treasure of scripture knowledge. John got the sealed book opened by weeping, Rev. v. 5. God often brings a truth to the Christian's hand as a return of prayer, which he had long hunted for in vain with much labour and study: 'There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets,' Dan. ii. 22; and where doth he reveal the secrets of his word but at the throne of grace? 'From the first day,' saith the angel, 'that thou didst set thine heart to understand and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words;' that is, for thy prayer, Dan. x. 12. And what was this heavenly messenger's errand to Daniel but to open more fully the Scripture to him? as appears by ver. 14 compared with ver. 21. This holy man had got some knowledge by his study in the word, and this sets him a praying, and prayer fetched an angel from heaven to give him more light. If ever we know the mind of God, we must be beholden to the Spirit of God for it: 'When the Spirit of truth is come, he will lead you into all truth,' John xvi. 13. And the Spirit is the fruit of Christ's intercession: 'I will pray the Father, and he will send the Comforter,' &c. Now there must be a concurrence of our prayer with his intercession. While our High-Priest is offering incense within the veil, we are to be praying without for that for which he is interceding within.

Now, to quicken thee to pray with more importunity for this manuduction of the Holy Spirit to lead thee into truth, First, Let the dread of those scriptures which set forth the danger of errors and false doctrines fall upon thee, that thou mayest not think thou goest on a slight errand when praying to be preserved from them, as if it were of no consequence whether thou hast thy request or not. It is one of the devil's best policies, by sinking the price of errors in the thoughts of men, to make them thereby the more vendible. Many think they shall not pay so dear for an error in judgment as for a sin in practice; yea, some fancy a man may be saved in any religion,—a principle that must needs tend to make them that hold it careless in their choice. That sin shall not want customers which men think they shall pay little or nothing for. Some can be content to be drunk on free cost, that would not, were their own purse to pay the reckoning. How comes fornication to abound so much among the Romish clergy, but because it is counted so petty a sin by them? And I wish that error, which is the fornication of the mind, were not by many among ourselves thought so little of. But woe be to those that tempt men on to sin by setting cheaper rates on their head than the word of God hath done. If once the dread of sin be worn off the conscience, no wonder if we see men as boldly leap upon it as the frogs in the fable on the log. Fear makes the body more apt to take infection, but it preserveth the soul from the infection of sin. Now, that thou mayest the more stand in fear of drinking in the poison of any corrupt and unsound doctrine, let thy mind ponder on a few scriptures

Digitized by Google

which shew both their detestable and damning nature. In Gal. v. 19, heresy is called a 'work of the flesh,' and reckoned among those sins which shut the doors of heaven: 'They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God,' verse 21. They are called doctrines of devils. And if they come from the devil, whither must they lead but to hell? Such as are against the fundamental principles of the gospel, are inconsistent with the love and favour of God. He 'that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God,' 2 John 9. And who, think you, shall have him that hath not God? Were there no other scripture against this kind of sin but that 2 Pet. ii. 1, it were enough to strike the heretic through his loins, and make the knees of every seducer, like Belshazzar's at the sight of the handwriting on the wall, to knock one against the other,—'There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.' So that if a man hath a mind to get the start of other sinners, he need do no more than open his sails to the wind of heretical doctrine, and he is likely to make a short voyage to hell of it; for these bring upon them swift destruction. Nay, the Spirit of God, the more to aggravate their deplored state, brings in three most dreadful instances of Divine vengeance that ever was executed upon any sinners, namely the detrusion of the apostate angels from heaven to hell, the drowning of the old world, and the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah by raining hell, as it were, out of heaven upon them. I say, he brings these as patterns and pledges of that vengeance which shall certainly befall this kind of sinners. And by this time I hope thou wilt be warm in thy prayer against this dangerous enemy. Secondly, When thou hast thus possessed thy heart with the dread of being led into any corrupt opinion, then strengthen thy faith from those comfortable scriptures which assure thee that no sincere saint shall be left to fall finally into any soul-damning error. Christ is as able for, and faithful in, his prophetic and kingly offices as in his priestly. Surely he will not have the least care of his people's understanding, which is a guide to their whole man, and is that faculty which he first practiseth upon in the work of conversion. Thou hast therefore as strong ground to believe he will preserve thee from damnable principles as damnable practises. It would be little advantage to be kept from one enemy, and left to the will and power of another. Christ's hedge comes round about his people. Solomon tells us, 'The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit; he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein,' Prov. xiv. 22; and so is the mouth of the seducer who comes with strange doctrines, whorish opinions. Now, who is this pit dug for? Indeed, if we look at Satan's design, it is a trap chiefly laid to catch the saint; he would, if possible, deceive the very elect. His greatest ambition is to spread his banners in this temple of God, and defile them whom God hath washed. But if we eye God's intention, it is a pit he suffers to be made for hypocrites, such who never heartily close with Christ and his truth: these are they whom God abhors, and therefore left by him to become a prey to those that seduce souls with their corrupt doctrines: 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11, 'Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' These, like the out-setting deer, are shot, while they that are within the pale are safe; or like the suburbs taken by the enemy, but those within the city escape their fury. It is the outward court, Rev. xi. 2, that is left to be trampled under foot. And in the forequoted place of the epistle to the Thessalonians, though he gives up hypocrites to be deceived by false teachers, as once Ahab by those knights of the post, his false prophets, yet, verse 13, he speaks comfortably to the elect, and shews, that the same decree which appointed them to salvation, provided also for their embracing the truth, as the necessary means leading thereunto; 'But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God from the beginning hath chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' And if God hath got possession of the head by his truth, and the heart by his sanctifying grace, he will keep them out of Satan's clutches. Go, therefore, and plead the promise for thy preservation: the promise, improved by faith at the throne of grace, will be thy best antidote in these times of gene-

Digitized by Google

ral infection. Never fear speeding when the promise bids thee go and prosper. The mercy is granted before thou ask it; only God will have thee by prayer lay thy claim to it, before thou art possessed of it. And for thy help I have set down some sweet promises, with which, if thou acquaint thyself, thou mayest be furnished both with grounds for thy faith, and arguments for thy prayer in this case; Matt. xxiv. 24; John vii. 12; x. 5, 29; 1 Cor. xi. 19; Phil. iii. 15; 1 John ii. 19, 20.

SECTION V.—Compare scripture with scripture. False doctrines, like false witnesses, agree not among themselves. Their name may be called Legion, for they are many. But truth is one, and one scripture sweetly harmonises with another. Hence it is, though there were many penmen of sacred writ, and those of several ages, one after another, yet they all are said to have but one mouth: Luke i. 70, 'As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.' All had one mouth, because they accord so perfectly together. The best way, therefore, to know the mind of God in one text, is to lay it to another. The lapidary useth one diamond to cut another, so should we one place of Scripture to interpret another. Scriptures compared, like glasses set one against another, cast a light to each other. Nehem. viii. 8, 'They' (that is the Levites), 'read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.' They gave them the meaning of what they read by the Scripture itself. Now, in comparing scripture with scripture, be careful thou interpret obscure places by the more plain and clear, and not the clear by the dark. Errors creep into the most obscure places, and there take sanctuary. Some things are hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned wrest. No wonder they should stumble in those dark and difficult places, when they turn their back on that light which plainer scriptures afford to lead them safely through; 'He that is born of God, sinneth not, but keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not,' 1 John v. 18. This is a dark place, from which some run away with the notion, and conclude that there is a perfect state, free from all sin, attainable in this life; whereas a multitude of plain scriptures testify against such a conclusion, 1 Kings viii. 38; Prov. xx. 9; Eccles. vii. 20; Job ix. 20; Phil. iii. 12; 1 John i. 8—10, &c. So that it must be in a limited and qualified sense, that he that is born of God sins not; he sins not finally or comparatively, not as the carnal wretch doth: and the wicked one toucheth him not; that is, not so as to transfuse his own nature and disposition into him, as the fire the wood it comes near, assimilating it to its own nature. This rule of using plain scriptures as a key to unlock obscure ones, will hold in all other instances. And, blessed be God, though to tame our pride he hath inserted some knotty passages, yet the necessary saving truths are of easy access, even to the weakest understanding. *Salubriter Spiretus Sanctus ita, Scripturas Sanctas modificavit, ut locis apertioribus fami occurreret, obscurioribus fastidia detergeret.—Aug. de Doc. Ch.* lib. ii. c. 6. There is enough in the plain places of Scripture to keep the weak from starving, and in the obscure to lift them above contempt of the strongest.

SECTION VI.—Consult with thy faithful guides whom God hath set over thee in his church. Though people are not to pin their faith on the minister's sleeve, yet they are 'to seek the law at his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts,' Mal. ii. 7. Christ directs his kids, for their safety, that they turn not aside into by-paths of error, and fall not into the hands of false teachers; that they go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed beside the shepherds' tents, Cant. i. 8. The devil knows well, that if he can send away the shepherd, he may soon catch the sheep; and these times prove sadly, that he is not mistaken. When were people's affections more withdrawn from their ministers? And when were their judgments more poisoned with error? Of what sort, I pray, are those, that have been trepanned into dangerous errors in our late unhappy times? Have they not mostly this brand upon them? Are they not such who would sooner hearken to a stranger—(may be a Jesuit in a buff coat, or with a blue apron before him),—seek to any mountebank that comes they know not whence, is here to-day and gone to-morrow, than to their own ministers, who from God have the rule over them, and watch for their souls, as they that must give account to God for them! yea, who, for many

Digitized by Google

years' experience in life and doctrine, they have found able and faithful? In the fear of God, consider this! It is not your ministers in their public ministry, but these hucksters and quacks in corners, practising upon you, that have privily brought in damnable doctrines, and leavened so great a lump of people in the nation with sour and unsound doctrine. If thou wouldst, therefore, be preserved from error, make use, as of the sword of the word in thy own hand, so of the holy skill that God hath given thy faithful minister for thy defence. Wait on his public ministry, praying for Divine assistance to be poured down on him, and a Divine blessing from his labours to fall on thyself. If at any time thou art in the dark concerning his message, resort to him, and I dare promise thee (if he answers to his name—a faithful minister of the gospel) an easy access and hearty welcome to him; only come to learn, not to cavil; to have thy conscience satisfied, and not from any vain curiosity. Our Saviour, who was so willing to satisfy his disciples concerning the doctrine he publicly preached, that in private he opened it to them more fully; yet, when they came with nice and curious questions, he rather chose to repel that humour by reproof, than cherish it by a satisfying answer: 'It is not for you to know the times and the seasons.' And at another time,—'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.' He takes Peter off from an unprofitable question, to mind a necessary duty.

CHAPTER XXV.

DIRECTIONS HOW TO USE THIS SWORD FOR THE CUTTING DOWN AND CONQUERING THE LUSTS IN OUR OWN BOSOMS, AND TEMPTATIONS TO SIN FROM WITHOUT.

THE third enemy we are to fight, is made up of an army of lusts, lodged within our own bosoms, which have Satan to head and lead them forth against us. And who that believes he hath a soul to lose, can be unwilling to engage against this cursed combination of lusts and devils! The Romans were said, when in war with other nations, to fight for honour and glory, but against the Carthaginians, for their life and being. In this war against sin and Satan, both lie at stake. This is the most noble war of all. Noble, first, because just. It is too true, I fear, what one saith of the wars which the monarchs of this world wage one against another, that the cause is very seldom so clear for which they take arms, but there is some ground of scruple left in the conscience of the undertaker. But here we are put out of all doubt. This, without abusing the name, may be called 'The Holy War;' for it is against the only enemy that the holy God hath in the world, who hath himself taken the field, and set up his royal standard in defiance of it; to which he calls all mankind, some by the voice of a natural conscience, and others by the loud sound of his word, to repair, and upon our allegiance to him, our sovereign Lord and Creator, to help him against the mighty, not because he needs our help, but expects our duty, and had rather reward our loyalty, than punish our rebellion. Some have been found, who for shame have killed themselves, because their prince, through their cowardice, had lost the victory. Oh, what confusion, then, will one day fill our faces, if we, by our faintness or treachery, do what in us lies to help Satan and sin to triumph over God himself! But, again, it is a noble war, because hard and difficult. This is an enemy stout and stubborn, such as will try both our skill and strength to the uttermost. Never did a coward overcome in this war. What sin loses is but by inches, and what it gains it hardly lets go. They who follow this war closest, will find a life's work, at least, of it. O, you that love brave exploits, and hunt for enterprises that only a few generous spirits dare undertake, here is that which you look for; fighting with men, and storming of castles, is but children's play to this encounter, where devils and lusts are to be repelled. 'He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city,' Prov. xvi. 32; better, because he overcomes a worse enemy, infinitely more potent. Few, alas! of the world's swordsmen, so famed for their conquests, but have lived and died slaves to sin, cowardly submitting the neck of their souls to draw the iron chariot of a base lust, while they have proudly sat to be drawn in triumph by those whom they have taken prisoners in war. Thus, as Hannibal was

Digitized by Google

beaten at home in his own country, who was a victor in his foreign expeditions; so too many that do great feats at arms abroad, which makes them famous in this world, are miserably beaten and shamefully trampled upon by their own corruptions at home, which will make them much more infamous in the other world. But be not you, O ye saints, dismayed at the report of your enemies' strength and number; the greater will be your victory, and the more your captives to draw your triumphal chariot; neither let your hearts faint to see the conquering Cæsars despoiled of their ensign of honour by this enemy, which themselves had won from others, and to die slaves to their lusts, that had lived conquerors over men. Remember, for your comfort, it is but the unbelieving world, such as are without spiritual arms, and so abandoned of God, that are left thus to become a prey to sin and Satan: but you have a God on your side, who gives you the consecrated sword of his word for your defence, a weapon whose edge Satan has already felt, and therefore trembles whenever faith draws it forth. He that made this leviathan, (as is said of the other, Job xl. 19,) can make his sword approach to him, and the heart of all thy lusts also. But, my task in this place is not to excite you to, but direct you in the management of your fight, with this your enemy, and that by teaching you the use of this one weapon, the word of God, in order to repel motions to sin from within, or temptations to it from Satan without.

Section I.—Take some pains to collect out of the word the several lineaments with which the Spirit of God doth paint out the deformity of sin, that so thou mayest make it the more odious and hateful to thy thoughts, when by laying them together, thou shalt see in its true picture (drawn by so skilful and faithful a hand) the fair face of this goodly lady, whose beauty Satan doth so highly commend to thy wanton embraces. Poor man sins upon Satan's credit, and receives it into his bosom, as Jacob did his wife into his bed, before he sees its face, or knows well what it is; and therefore as he in the morning found her to be not that beautiful Rachel as was promised, but blear-eyed Leah, so the sinner, too late, when his conscience awakes, sees himself miserably cheated and disappointed of what he looked for, and finds a purgatory, when he expected to find a paradise.

Now, that thou mayest the better see the ugly shape of this horrid monster, sin, observe from the word of God these four particulars:

First, The birth and pedigree of sin, who is its father, and from whom it is descended. The holy God disowns it. The sun can as soon beget darkness, as God, who is the father of lights, be the author of sin: 'From him comes every good and perfect gift,' James i. 13. But, O sin, whence art thou? Thou art not his creature; he neither made thee, nor ever moved any to thy production. Certainly, if it were from him, he would love it: every one loves his own child, though never so black,—much more doth God love what is his. We find him looking back upon every day's work of the creation, and upon all at last, pleased with what he had done,—all was very good, Gen. i. But for what he thinks of sin, see Deut. vii. 22; Prov. vi. 16; Rev. ii. 6, 15; where he expresseth his detestation and hatred of it, from which hatred proceeds all those direful plagues and judgments thundered from the fiery mouth of his most holy law against it; nay, not only the work, but worker also of iniquity becomes the object of his hatred, Psa. v. 5. Well, at whose door, then, doth God lay this brat, to find a father? Surely at the devil's, John viii. 44: 'Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.' And again, in the same place, 'When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.' Sin is a brat which calls the devil both father and mother; for of himself, even of his own free will (the womb wherein it was conceived) did he beget it; and having begot it, put it out to nurse to man. And is not man, who was made to serve and enjoy the great God his Maker, highly set up, to suckle and carry this his infernal master's child about in his arms? Ah, poor man, whence art thou fallen! It is strange, that the very remembering whose offspring thyself wert, doth not strike thee into a horror, to see thy precious soul debased unto such servitude, as to fulfil the lusts of that cursed spirit.

Section II.—The names and titles with which the word stigmatizes sin. And God, to be sure, miscalls none: if a thing be sweet, he will not say it is bitter; if good, he will not call it evil; for he places a woe upon his head that

Digitized by Google

doth so, Isa. v. 20. Never think to find honey in the pot, when God writes poison on its cover. We may say of every sin in this respect, as Abigail of her husband; as is its name in Scripture, so is it. If God call it folly, there is no wisdom to be found in it. The devil, indeed, teacheth sinners to cover foul practices with fair names,—superstition must be styled devotion; covetousness, thrift; pride in apparel, handsomeness; looseness, liberty; and madness, mirth. And truly there is need for sinners to do thus, to make this fulsome dish go down with less regret. There are some who have made a hearty meal of horseflesh, or the like carrion, under a better name, whose stomachs would have risen against it, if they had known what it was. Therefore, as persecutors of old wrapped the Christians in the skins of those beasts which would render them the most desirable prey to those they were cast; so Satan and our false hearts present sins to us under those names that will sharpen our appetites to them, or at least take away the abhorrency our consciences else would shew against them: but canst thou be content, poor soul, to be so cheated? Will the fire burn thee the less, into which thou art emboldened to put thy finger, because a knave, that owes thee an ill turn, tells thee that it will not hurt thee? Hear rather what the God of truth saith of sin, and by what names he calls it, and you shall find, that whatever is dreaded by us, or hated, feared, or loathed, in all the world, are borrowed and applied to sin:—the vomit of dogs, the venom of serpents, the stench of rotten sepulchres, dunghills, deadly diseases and sores, gangrenes, leprosies, and plagues attributed to it, 2 Pet. ii. 20; Luke iii. 7; Rom. iii. 13; 2 Tim. ii. 17; 1 Kings viii, 38; yea, hell is raked for an expression to set it out, it being compared to the very fire of hell itself! James iii. 6. And because of the penury and straitness of these appellations (not able to express its full horridness), therefore it is called by its own name, as the worst that God himself can say thereof, 'sinful sin,' Rom. vii. 13. Now what shall be done to the thing that the great God thus loathes, and loads with such names of dishonour, thereby to signify his abhorrence of it? What? Every gracious heart will soon resolve, that he should pursue it with fire and sword, till he have executed upon it the judgment written in its utter ruin and destruction.

Section III.—The nature of sin, as the word defines it. See its description, 1 John. iii. 4: 'Sin is the transgression of the law;' a few words, but of weight enough to press the soul that commits it to hell, yea, to press sin itself to death in the heart of a saint, if laid on with these considerations. First, Whose law it is by sinning we break:—not of some petty prince (and yet such conceive their honour so deeply concerned in their laws, that they take vengeance on the violators of them), but of the great God, whose glorious name is in every attribute assaulted and reproached by the sinner, yea, the very life and being of God endeavoured to be destroyed: for he that would rob God of his honour, is an enemy to his very being, because God's being is so wrapped up in his glory, that he cannot outlive the loss of it. These, it is true, are above the reach of the sinner's short arm; but that is no thanks to him, because his sin aims at these, though it cannot carry its shot so far as to hurt him. Secondly, What law it is:—not cruel, written with the blood of his creatures, as the laws of some tyrant princes are, who consult their own lust, and not the people's good, in their edicts. But this law is equal and good; in the keeping of which is life. So that no provocation is given by any rigour of unnecessary taxes imposed upon us to rise up against it. 'What iniquity,' saith God, 'have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' Jer. ii. 5. He that put away his wife, was to give her a bill of divorce, declaring the cause of his leaving her. Thus God condescends to expostulate with sinners, and asks what evil they can charge upon him or his government, that they forsake him. But, alas! no more cause can be given, that why a beast in a fat pasture should break the hedge to get into a barren heath, or dirty lane, where nothing but starving is to be had. Thirdly, At whose motion the poor creature transgresseth the good law of God, and that is of a cursed spirit (the devil), no less our enemy than God's. Now, for a child, at the solicitation of his father's greatest enemy, and his own also, to take up rebellious arms against a dear, loving parent, adds to the monstrosity and unnaturalness of the fact. This thou dost, Christian, when by sin thou transgressest the law of God. And now, by this time, methinks I see thy blood rise and boil with anger in thee, while thy God points to thy sin and tells thee,

Digitized by Google

This, O my child, is the enemy that would take away my glory, and life too, by thy means, who, by a debt both of nature and grace, owest thy whole self to live and die for the maintaining of my honour! Art thou not as ready to fall upon thy sin, and drag it to execution, as the servants of Ahasuerus were to lay hold of Haman, and cover his face as a son of death, when their prince did but vent his wrath conceived against him? Esther vii. 8. Certainly, were but the love of God well kindled in our bosoms, we should even spit fire on the face of any that durst tempt us to sin against him.

SECTION IV.—The properties of sin discovered by the word of God. I shall content myself with three. First, A defiling property, called 'filthiness of the flesh and spirit,' 2 Cor. vii. 1. It besmears both. The whole world is said to lie in wickedness, as a beast in his filth, or as a rotten carcase in its putrefaction, 1 John v. 19. It is that leprosy which infects man, and the house he lives in also. Wherefore did God send the flood in Noah's time, but to wash away that filthy generation as dung from the face of the earth? But because this post-house of the world is not cleared sufficiently, it is reserved for a more thorough purgation by fire at the last day. Do but think, Christian, how beautiful man was till he was overcome by sin, and what a glory shone upon the whole creation before sin by its poisonous breath blasted it, and then guess what a filthy thing it is, what a strong poison it is, that not only diffused its malignity through the soul and body of man, but had such direful effects upon the whole frame of the visible creation, that it will never come to its first beauty till, like a battered piece of plate, it be melted and refined by an universal conflagration. And is not your soul yet loathed with the thoughts of sin? Some beasts (they say the ermine for one) will die before they will be got into the dirt to defile their beautiful skin; and wilt thou, Christian, and that after Christ's Spirit hath cleansed thee, still remain in sin's puddle? God forbid! Did Ezekiel so abhor to eat man's dung, imposed on him by God, that he cries out, 'Ah, Lord God! behold my soul hath not been polluted,' &c., Ezek. iv. 14; and is any unclean lust, which God himself compares to no better thing, so dainty a bit as to be desired by thee, Christian, who hast sat at Christ's table and know what entertainment there is to be had? Methinks thou shouldst rather cry out with the prophet, Ah! Lord, my soul hath not been, or, at least, let it not be, polluted with this abominable thing. Secondly, A disturbing property. Sin breaks the peace of the soul, yea, of the whole world. It brings confusion with it, and makes the place a seat of war wherever it comes. An army of evils are at his heels, to set down where it is lodged: 'If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,' Gen. iv. 7. 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' Isa. lvii. 21. Here is God's hand to the warrant, sentencing the sinner to the rack of a self-torturing conscience. Who is able to express the anguish which an accusing conscience feels, and those dreadful fits of convulsions with which it tears itself? One you hear roaring and crying out, 'There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin,' Psa. xxxviii. 3. Another, 'While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted,' Psa. lxxxviii. 15. A third, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear,' Gen. iv. 13. And a fourth, so unable to stand under the clamour of his guilt, that he runs to the halter and hangs himself, to get out of the din it makes in his ears, Matt. xxvii. 5. And is not he likely to be well cured of his torments that throws himself into hell-fire to find ease? And as sin disturbs the inward peace of the soul, so the outward peace of the world. What else but sin hath put the world in an uproar, and set all the creatures together by the ears? 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?' James iv. 1. This sets nearest relations at bitter feuds, so that husband and wife, parents and children, cannot abide together under one roof. Delilah betrays her husband into his enemies' hands, and Absalom riseth up to take away the life of his father. This is the whisperer that separates the best friends, and makes those who have drunk of our cup to lift up their heel against us; and those with whom we have taken sweet counsel together, to plot our ruin, and give counsel against our very life. In a word, such a fire sin is, that the flames it kindles fly not only from one house to the other, but from one nation to another. All the water in the sea that runs between kingdom and kingdom cannot quench the wars it raiseth; but it makes men

Digitized by Google

that live at one end of the world thirst for the blood and treasure of those that live at the other; so that the earth is but as a cock-pit, where there is little else but fighting and killing one another. And is this the guest thou canst find in thy heart to bid welcome within thy bosom? Thirdly, A damning property. If all the mischief sin did us was in this world, it were bad enough; but, considering our short stay here, it would give some ease to our thoughts that we should have done with it and this life together; but to be worried here by it, and damned for it also to eternal torments in another world, this is intolerable! Methinks that place, Matt. xxv. 41, 'Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,' should make us sit down and consider whether any sin be so desirable as to make it worth lying in endless torments to obtain and enjoy it a few fleeting days, that are at an end almost as soon as they commence. Thou knowest, sinner, already, the best of thy sinful pleasures but not the worst of thy punishment, which is so great as to lose its chief emphasis by translating it into our language, and clothing it with expressions borrowed even from those things we most dread in this life. Alas! what is the fire and brimstone we see and fear so much here, to that which burns in the infernal lake! The fire in our chimney was made for our use and comfort chiefly, but that in hell is for no other end than to torment sinners in: this in our kitchen is kindled by a little puff of wind, and quenched by a little water; but 'the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle that,' Isa. xxx. 33; and where shall we find buckets to quench that which God kindles? They say smelling of the earth is healthful for the body; and taking in the scent of this sulphurous pit, by frequent meditation, cannot but be as wholesome for the soul. O Christian, be sometimes walking in the company of those scriptures which set out the state of the damned in hell, and their exquisite torments. This is the true house of mourning, and the going into it, by serious meditation, is a sovereign means to make the living lay it to heart; and laying it to heart, there is the less fear that thou wilt throw thyself by thy impenitency into this uncomfortable place, who art offered so fair a mansion in heaven through faith and repentance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOME SCRIPTURE ANSWERS FITTED TO THE COMMON ARGUMENTS OF THE TEMPTER, WITH WHICH HE USUALLY ENTICETH TO SIN, ARE HERE BROUGHT TO THE CHRISTIAN'S HAND FOR HIS DEFENCE.

Secondly, Provide thyself with Scripture answers to Satan's false reasonings with which he puts a fair colour on his foul motions, the better to gain thy consent. He is wily; thou hadst need be wary. He not only propounds the sinful object, but sets a fair gloss upon it, and urges the soul with arguments to embrace his offer. And when sin comes thus forth, Goliath like, it is not Saul's armour, but the smooth stones of the brook,—not thy own resolution, but the divinity of Scripture argument, that can preserve thee, or prostrate thy enemy. Now, thou wilt find in the word an answer put into thy mouth to repel all Satan's sophistry. And this, indeed, is to be an Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, when we can stop the devil's mouth, and choke his bullets, with a word seasonably interposed between us and the temptation.

Section I.—Sometimes Satan thus insinuates himself into a soul. What, man, will one sin, if yielded to, so much hurt thee? One mole doth not mar the beauty of the face, nor can one sin spoil the beauty of thy soul; and it is no more that I am a suitor for. If I bade thee wallow in every puddle, thou mightest well abhor the motion; but why art thou so afraid of one spot being seen on thy garment? The best jewel hath its flaw, and the holiest saint his failing. Now, to repel this motion when so modestly proposed—

First, The word tells us that no sin goes single. It is impossible to embrace or allow one sin, and be free of others. For, First, He that yields to one sin, casts contempt upon the authority that made the whole law, and upon this account breaks it all: 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,' James ii. 10. And he gives the reason in the next words: 'For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art a transgressor of the law.' Not that he is guilty of all distributively, but collectively, as Estius well

Digitized by Google

observes; for the law is one copulative: one commandment cannot be wronged, but all are interested in the same; as the whole body suffers by a wound given to one part: 'God spake all these words,' Exod. xx. 1. They are ten words, but one law. Secondly, By allowing one sin, we disarm and deprive ourselves of having a conscientious argument to defend ourselves against any other. He that can go against his conscience in one, cannot plead conscience against any other; for if the authority of God awes him from one, it will from all. 'How can I do this, and sin against God?' saith Joseph. I doubt not but his answer would have been the same if his mistress had bid him tell a lie for her, as now when she enticed him to lie with her. The ninth commandment would have bound him as well as the seventh. Hence the apostle exhorts not to 'give place to the devil,' Eph. iv. 27, implying, by yielding to one, we lose our ground, and what we lose, he gains; and let him alone to improve his advantages. The little wimble once entered, the workman can then drive a great nail. One sin will widen thy swallow a little,—thou wilt not so much strain at the next. Thirdly, Allow one sin, and God will give you over to others: 'Wherefore God also gave them up unto uncleanness,' Rom. i. 24. The Gentiles gave themselves to idolatry, ver. 21, and God gave them up unto other beastly lusts. When Judas began to play the thief, I question whether he meant to turn traitor; no, his treason was a punishment for his thievery. He allowed himself in a secret sin, and God gave him up to one more open and horrid. Fourthly, Suppose thou couldst, which is impossible, take one sin into thy bosom, and shut all the rest out, yet the word tells thee that thou art a servant to that one sin: 'His servants ye are to whom ye obey,' Rom. vi. 16; and consequently the devil's servants, whose kingdom you endeavour to hold up, by defending, though but this one castle, against the Lord your Maker. Neither will it excuse thee to say thou intendest not so. Haply covetousness is thy sin, and it is thy profit thou aimest at, not siding with the devil against God. Though this is not thy express end, yet it is the end of the sin which thou committest, and of Satan that put thee upon the work, and so will be charged upon thee at last. The common soldier ordinarily looks no higher than his pay; this is it which draws him into the field; yet they make themselves traitors by assisting him that leads them on against their prince; and it will not serve the turn for them to say they fought for their pay, and not to dethrone him. Ahab sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord, 1 Kings xxi. 20; and yet we read not that he made any express covenant with the devil; but the meaning is, he did that which in effect amounted to no less. He knew that if he sinned he should pay his soul for it, and he would have his lust, notwithstanding he was acquainted with its price, and therefore interpretatively, he sold his soul that he might enjoy his sin.

Secondly, Thou mayest learn from the word that thou canst not be a servant to any one sin, and to God at the same time; you cannot serve two masters; you cannot serve God and mammon. By mammon is meant one particular lust,—covetousness. One body may as well have two souls, as one soul two masters. One soul hath but one love; and two cannot have the supremacy of it. I have heard, indeed, of a wretch that said he had one soul for God, and another for the devil; but if he hath one soul in hell, I am afraid he will not find another in heaven; and one sin will as certainly send thee thither, as a thousand. 'Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, &c., shall inherit the kingdom of God.' He doth not only exclude him that is guilty of all these, but any of these. It is certain all men shall die, but all do not die of the same disease; and as certain all impenitent sinners shall be damned; but one is damned for one, and a second for another, but all meet at last in the same hell.

SECTION II. — May be thou art tempted to sin by an opportunity of committing it in secret, where thou shalt not pay the loss of thy credit for the purchase of thy pleasure. This was the snare the simple young man's foot was taken in, Prov. vii. 18: his strumpet tells him the good man was from home, the coast was clear; they might drink their stolen waters without fear of being indicted for the theft. Too many, alas! whom shame of the world keeps from knocking at the front door, are easily persuaded to sin, if they may slip in at the postern. Saul himself, though ashamed to go to a witch in his princely

Digitized by Google

robe, because he had possessed the world with an opinion of his hatred of that sin, by puting such to death, yet is not afraid to go *incognito* to one. Therefore, as it added much to the weight of the temptations with which the devil assaulted Christ, that he came to him in the wilderness and solicited him to a private, yea, secret acknowledgment of him, where none could tell tales what passed between them; so it doth to the glory of that complete victory which Christ got over Satan in them all. And how got Christ it, but by this sword of the word? Take, Christian, therefore, the same weapon to defend thyself against the same enemy. First, The word will tell thee that God is privy to thy most secret sin,—'Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance,' Psa. xc. 8. They are as plainly seen by him, as anything can be by us at noon day. Nay, he doth not only see and know them, but sets them before him as a mark to shoot his arrows of vengeance at,—'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good,' Prov. xv. 3. As he sees when thou shuttest thy closet to pray, and will reward thy sincerity: so when thou dost it to sin in secret, he will reward thy hypocrisy. Now, if 'a king sitting on his throne, scattereth away all evil with his eyes,' Prov. xx. 8, how much more powerful would the eye of God, if seen looking on us, chase away the most secret motion that stirreth in our heart to sin! Better all the world to see thee than God, who hath wrong done him by the sin, and therefore, in justice to himself, he must visit thee with punishment. He cannot let any go unpunished, because he is a righteous judge; but there are some sins which require a more immediate hand of Divine vengeance than others, and therefore called 'crying sins;' and they are such which, either by the place and power of the offender, man dare not punish, or else so secretly committed, that man cannot take cognizance of the fact, as Cain's bloody murder on his brother,—'Thy brother's blood crieth,' Gen. iv. 10. Secondly, The word tells thee of an informer which thou hast in thy own bosom,—conscience, which goes along with thee, and is witness to all thy fine-laid plots, and what it sees it writes down, for it is a court of record. Thou canst not sin so fast but it can write after thee; and the pen with which conscience writes down our sins hath a sharp point, it cuts deep into the very heart and soul of the sinner. The heathen's thoughts are said to accuse them, Rom. ii. 15; and no torment in the world comparable to an accusing conscience: 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, who can bear?' Prov. xviii. Who! Not men, not angels. No eye affrights a sinner more than his own: it is that which he most desired to run from, but least can. Such a poor wretch is like Regulus in his barrel stuck with nails,—which way soever he turns himself he is pricked and wounded. O read those sad instances of Cain, Saul, and Judas, with others upon Scripture record, who have been upon this rack, and thou wilt be afraid to sin when conscience stands by. Thirdly, Consult the word, and thou wilt find that God usually hath put them to shame in this world, who have promised themselves most secrecy in their sinning. It is one of God's names to be a revealer of secrets, Dan. ii. 47; and among other secrets he forgets not to bring to light these hidden things of darkness, and that often in this world. Indeed, the attribute of his omniscience suffers deeply by secret sins; in these, men speak what base thoughts they have of God, as if he were a God of the day, and not of the night; therefore, to vindicate this attribute, and to strike an inward fear thereof into the hearts of men, he digs these foxes out of their holes, wherein they earth themselves, and exposes their sins to the view of the world, which they thought none should have known besides themselves and their partners in the sin. Such an effect had the discovery of Ananias and Sapphira's secret sin: 'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things,' Acts v. 11. See, therefore, how God hath befooled men when they have been most artful in hiding their sins from the world's eye. No art was wanting in the patriarchs to conceal their unnatural sin against their brother. What a fair, probable tale do they tell the old man their father, who believed all, and inquired no farther! How true were they among themselves, though so many in the plot! That none of them should mention it at any time was strange! How long did this sleep before it was discovered! and what a strange providence brought their wickedness to light! So Gehazi played his part cunningly enough, which made

Digitized by Google

him so bold to come before his master, and impudently lie to his head, not dreaming the least that he was aware of his sin; yet this man is found out, and for the garments he got of Naaman by a lie, he had another given of the Lord, which he was to wear as a livery for his sin, for he was clothed with a leprosy; a garment not to hide his shame, but to discover it to all the world; a garment more lasting than the two changes of suits he had from the Syrian; for this lasted him all his life; neither was it then worn out, but to be put on by his children after him, 2 Kings v. 27. Yea, be he a saint, yet if he goes about to save himself from the shame of a sin, by any secret plot of wickedness, he takes the direct way to bring that upon him which he contrives to keep off. Uriah's blood was shed only as a sinful expedient to save David's credit, that would have suffered, if his folly with Bathsheba should become a town-talk: and how sped he with his plot? Ah, poor man! all comes out to his greater shame; this engaged God to lay him open; David shall know that God will be as tender of his own honour, as he is of his credit; 'For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun,' 2 Sam. xii. 12. Yea, David himself at last is sick of his own plot; and was not at first more studious to hide his sin, than afterward willing to acknowledge it: and therefore we find him (Ps. li.) standing as it were in a white sheet, and doing voluntary penance for his sin, in all the churches of God, so long as the Scriptures shall be read in their assemblies, to the end of the world.

SECTION III.—May be thou art tempted to sin by the example of others. Indeed, though example be an artificial argument, yet it is of great force with many, especially when the persons quoted in favour of a sin, be either the most, or thought to be the best. When most, they carry presently with them those that are false-hearted, or weak-headed, as dead fish swim with the stream; for with such, shame strikes the greatest stroke, and a multitude to bear one company in a sin takes away the shame of it; where all go naked, few will blush: they rather are exposed to shame that will be singular, and not do as the rest: as Micaiah, who was made a scorn because he would not tune his pipe to Ahab's ear, nor join with the whole college of his flattering chaplains in their judgment. Or if they be such who have the reputation for wisdom and piety, then it often proves a snare to them that are none of the worst; which should make all of high place or eminent grace very circumspect what opinion or practice they espouse. The devil is greatly pleased when he can get such to set their hand to his testimonial. The country will soon ring of this, and their example be shewn everywhere to draw in others:—Why, such an one is of this opinion: he holds this, and doth that; I hope he is one you reverence and honour. Now, in this case, consult with the word, and it will bring thee off this temptation. First, The word commands, that we bring the examples of men, be they who they will, to the test of the word. Is it their opinion that is quoted? 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' Isa. viii. 20. It is the light which a man carries in his lantern which we follow; when that is gone we leave him. Now we see by this Scripture, that he hath no light, who hath not the word to vouch his opinion: so that neither knows he where himself goes, nor we where such an one will lead us. Again, is it the practice of another that is laid before thee for thy copy to write after? What saith the word? 'Follow not a multitude to do evil,' Exod. xxiii. 2. Examples are not our warrant, but precepts; neither will it procure a man a discharge because he had a precedent in his sin. Adam, indeed, said the woman, gave him the apple; but it did not excuse him from paying the reckoning with her: she was, indeed, first in the transgression, yet both met in the punishment. Wouldst thou eat poison, because another dares be so bold as to do so? Surely his example cannot make the poison less deadly to thee. Secondly, The word will tell thee, that the best of saints do not always foot it right, but too often tread awry: 'In many things we offend all, Jam. iii. 2. And he that is himself subject to step awry, may also lead thee aside. Therefore Paul, as holy a man as ever lived, when he calls others after him, would have them follow him with their eyes open, to see whither he followed Christ; 'Be ye followers of me, even as I am also of Christ,' 1 Cor. xi. 1. The holiest life of the best saint on earth is but an imperfect translation of the perfect rule of the holiness in the words and therefore must be tried by it

Digitized by Google

Hence it is the character of sincerity, to look to the way rather than the company. 'The highway of the upright is to depart from evil,' Prov. xvi. 17. He consults with the word, whether the way be good or evil: if he finds it evil, he will not enter into it to bear another company; no, though he be a saint. Indeed, God suffers some to step awry, that he might prove others. Thus heresies come, 'that they who are approved may be made manifest,' 1 Cor. xi. 19: and Deut. xiii. 3, 'Thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet, for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart.' Thus I have given a few instances by which you see how this sword of the word, as that in the cherub's hand, may be turned every way to preserve thee from venturing to sin upon any pretence whatever.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TWO DIRECTIONS MORE, HOW TO USE THE WORD FOR OUR DEFENCE AGAINST TEMPTATIONS TO SIN.

THIRDLY, Hide the word in thy heart. This was David's preservative, Psa. cxix. 11, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.' It was not the Bible in his hand to read it, not the word on his tongue to speak of it, nor in his head to get a notional knowledge of it; but the hiding it in his heart, that he found effectual against sin. It is not meat in the dish, but taken into the stomach, that nourisheth; not physic in the glass, but taken into the body, that purgeth. Now, heart in Scripture, though it be used for all the faculties of the soul, yet principally for the conscience and the affections.

SECTION I.—For the conscience. 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things,' 1 John iii. 20. That is, if our conscience condemns us justly, our case is sad,' because God knows of us more than we do of ourselves, and can charge us with many sins that conscience is not privy to. Thus, Christian, labour to hide the word in thy heart, that is, in thy conscience; let it there have a throne, and it will keep thee in a holy awe. First, Look upon the word as stamped with Divine authority, the law which the great God gives thee, his poor creature, to walk by. This impressed on thy conscience would make thee tremble at the thought of a sin, which is the traitor's dagger that strikes at God himself, by the contempt it casts upon his law. And if some assassins, intending to stab a prince, have been so overawed with a few beams of majesty, shot from his mortal brow, that their hearts would not serve them to make the horrid attempt; how much more must the dread of the great God's majesty, darted from his word into the creature's conscience, deter him from practising any treason against his maker! 'Princes persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of thy word,' Psa. cxix. 161. As if he had said, I had rather incur their wrath for my holiness, than make thy word my enemy by my sin. Secondly, Look upon the word of God, as that law by which thou art to be judged at the great day. 'God will judge the secrets of all men, according to my gospel,' Rom. ii. 16. Then the book of thy conscience shall be opened, and compared with this, and accordingly will sentence of life or death be pronounced by Christ thy judge. Thou mayest know beforehand how it will go with thee at that day: if now thou canst not stand before the word as opened by a poor minister, what will you do when it is opened by Christ? Now thy conscience from the word condemns thee, but not finally; for by timely repentance and faith, the sentence of this private court may be reversed, and the word which now binds thee over to death will acquit and justify thee. But at that great day of assize there will be a final decision of thy cause. If then judgment goes against thee, thou art a lost man for ever. No reversing the sentence to be expected, not so much as a reprieve to stay the execution: but as the word goeth out of the judge's mouth, the sinner's face is covered, to be immediately delivered into the tormenter's hands. And darest thou now, O man, bid any lust welcome, while thou seest the everlasting chains prepared, in which the word of God dooms to bind every sinner? Canst thou read thy sentence, and yet like thy sin that brings it inevitably upon thy head?

Digitized by Google

Heart in Scripture is most frequently taken for the will and affections.—'My son, give me thy heart,' Prov. xxiii. 26; that is, thy love: so, Deut. x. 12, 'To love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' And thus, Christian, to hide the word in thy heart, would be a rare antidote against the poison of sin. The chains of love are stronger than the chains of fear. Herod's love of Herodias was too hard for his fear of John. He had some hold of his conscience that awed him and bound his hands awhile; but his minion had his affections, and the heart can unbind the hands: his love to her made him throw off his respect to him, and at last imbrue his hands in his blood. He that is only a prisoner to the command, and bound to his good behaviour by the chains of terror which the threatening puts upon his conscience, may have these knocked off, and then he will shake off his obedience also. But he that loves the word, and the purity of its precepts, cannot turn traitor. When such an one sins, he makes as deep a wound in his own heart as in the law, and therefore trembles at displeasing God: Psa. cxix. 119, 120, 'I love thy testimonies; my flesh trembleth for fear of thee.' Oh, that is the blessed fear, which is the daughter of love! Now, to inflame thy heart with love to the word, consider,—First, It is thy most faithful monitor: it tells thee plainly of all thy faults, and will not suffer sin to lie upon thee, but points to the enemy that hunts for the precious soul's life; it discovers all the designs and plots Satan and thy beloved lusts have against thee. This made David love it so dearly; Psa. xix. 10, 'Moreover, by them thy servant is warned:' it warns thee of every danger, and shews thee how to escape it. Oh, how should this endear it to thee! Did Ahasuerus heap such abundant honour upon Mordecai, who had but once been a means to save his life by discovering a treason against his person! How much more shouldst thou honour and love the good word of God, which hath so often saved thy soul out of thy spiritual enemy's hands, and doth daily give thee warning how to escape the snares of sin, without which it were impossible for thee to find them out, or avoid them! Was David so affected with the wisdom and love of Abigail in the advice she gave him, whereby he was kept from shedding blood in his fury, that he took her into his bosom to be his wife, as a reward of her kindness to him; and shall not the counsel the word hath given thee, make thee in love much more with it? Secondly, The word is thy sweetest comforter. When the poor soul is distressed with guilt, and conflicteth with the terrors of Divine wrath for his sins, oh, what miserable comforters, then, are this world's pleasures and treasures! How little can any creature contribute to the ease of such!—no more than he who stands upon the shore, and sees his friend drowning in the sea, but knows not how to help him. It is the word alone that can walk upon those waves, and come to the soul's relief. This is able to restore the soul, and buoy it up from the bottom of the sea of despair. Though the soul be at its wits' end, and knows not what to do, yet then the word stands up, and, as it were, thus speaks to him:—Poor soul, thou shouldst have hearkened to my voice, and not have loossed from thy harbour by sinnning against God, to come to this harm. But be of good cheer, repent of thy folly, and speedily turn to thy God in Christ Jesus, and there shall be no loss of thy life. 'There is forgiveness with the Lord, therefore he may be feared.' And so in all other troubles, this sends in the saint's comfort; when the world gives him gall, this brings wine; when he meets with nothing but crosses and vexations from that, this sweetly recreates and cheers his spirits. Here the Christian hath those cooling waters with which he quencheth and allays all his sorrows. And you know what a treasure a spring or fountain is accounted in dry and hot countries. Surely, Christian, when thou considerest how many a sweet draught thou hast had from the wells of salvation, thou wilt cry out with David, Psa. cxix. 93, 'I will never forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me.' I do not wonder to see thy enemy endeavour to stop thy will at which thou shouldst draw thy comfort, but that he should be able to persuade thee to do it thyself is strange.

Section II.—Plead the promise against sin at the throne of grace. He that hath law on his side, we say, may sue the king; and he that hath a promise on his side, may, with a humble boldness, commence his suit with God. As the veins in the body have arteries to attend them with spirits, so precepts in the word have promises to inspirit the Christian, and empower him with strength

Digitized by Google

for his duty. Is there a command to pray? There is also a promise to enable for prayer, Zech. xii. 10; Rom. viii. 26. Doth God require us to give him our heart?—'My son, give me thy heart,' Prov. xxiii. 26. The promise saith, 'He will give a new heart to us,' Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Doth he command us to mortify our corruptions, and doth he not promise, that sin shall not have dominion over us? Rom. vi. 14. Now, to obtain this promise, thou must plead and press it believingly at the throne of grace: what the precept commands, the prayer of faith begs and receives. Look, therefore, thou take God in thy way. First, Besiege heaven, and then fear not but thou wilt overcome sin and hell when thou hast conquered heaven. Now thou art at war at God's cost; he that sets thee on, will bring thee off. David was a man at arms, and could handle his weapon against this enemy, as well as another, yet dares not promise himself success till he hath made God his second; Psa. cxix. 132, 'Order my steps in thy word, and let not iniquity have dominion over me.' But if thou thinkest to steal a victory by the strength of thy own resolution, expect an overthrow. And it will be a mercy thou shouldst be so served; for a defeat will teach thee humility for the future, but a victory would increase thy pride: and that is a sad victory, when one sin carries away the spoils which thou hast taken from another. Jehoshaphat took the right course to speed, who, though he had almost a million of men that he could draw into the field, without draining his garrisons, yet bespeaks God's help, as if he had not a man to fight for him; 2 Chron. xx. 12, 'We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.' If an Alexander or a Cæsar, had been at the head of such an army, I warrant you they would have known what to have done, and not doubted to carry all before them. But Jehoshaphat, a holy, humble man, was better instructed. He knew a host signifieth nothing, which hath not the Lord of hosts with them; and that the most valiant can find neither heart nor hand in the day of battle, without his leave who made both. Nor wilt thou, Christian, be able to use thy grace in an hour of temptation, without new grace from God, to excite and enforce what thou hast already received from him; and if thou expect this from him, he expects to hear from thee; neither is God unwilling to give what he hath promised, because he pays not the debt of the promise until it be sued for at the throne of grace; no, God takes this method, only to secure his own glory in the giving, and also to enlarge our comfort by receiving it in this way of prayer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW THE CHRISTIAN MAY USE THE SWORD OF THE WORD FOR HIS DEFENCE, IN ANY AFFLICTION; AND A DIRECTION TOWARD IT.

I COME now to give some little help, by way of direction, how the Christian may use this sword of the word for his defence against the last enemy, but not the least. And this is an army made up of many bands of afflictions, which from without invade and within distress him. The Christian, in this world, stands not as you may see some houses, so fenced and shadowed with hills or woods, that the wind beats but upon one side of them: no, he lies open to storms and tempests from all quarters. We read of a strange kind of wind that at once smote the four corners of the house in which Job's children were. Truly, thus the Christian's afflictions beset him round, no corner left unassaulted, and very often he is smitten on all sides at once; crossed in his estate, feeble in his body, and afflicted in his spirit; and when so many seas of sorrows meet, it is not easy work for the poor Christian's heart to stand unbroken amidst the concurrent violence of their waves. Though this is certain, that those dejections and perturbations with which the minds of the best saints are so discomposed and ruffled, yea, sometimes dismayed and distressed, cannot be charged upon any deficiency of the gospel's principles for their support and comfort; but rather on their own impotence and unskilfulness to apply them in their several exigencies. My present task is to drop a few words of counsel to the weak Christian, how he may use this sword of the word for his defence and comfort in any affliction without, or distress of spirit from within, that may assault him. Here I must not descend to particular cases (that were a voluminous work,

Digitized by Google

and not so proper for this place), but content myself with some general rules that may be applicable to all. Now, the cordial and restorative part of the word, which principally is prepared and provided for the soul's comfort in all its discomforts and distresses, is contained in the promises; these well studied and improved can alone make thee a comfortable Christian.

Now, if thou wouldst improve the promises, so as not to be trampled upon by Satan in any distress that comes upon thee, but comfortably lift up thy head in hope and confidence above the waves of thy present sorrows, then harken to what follows. First, Let it be thy chief care to have thy interest in, and right to the promises cleared up. This is the hinge on which the great dispute between thee and Satan will move in the day of trouble. Oh it is sad for a poor Christian to stand at the door of the promise in the dark night of affliction, afraid to draw the latch, whereas he should then come as boldly for shelter as a child into his father's house:—'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast,' Isa. xxvi. 20. He that hath his title to the promise proved from the word to his own conscience, will not be wrangled easily out of his comfort. Naboth would not part with his inheritance for the pleasure or displeasure of a king, but stands up in defence of his right, even unto death: and so resolves Job—'Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me,' Job xxvii. 5. This was his evidence for heaven, and therefore Satan used his best wits to make him throw it up, but never could affect it. His title was clear, and he will not be disputed out of it by Satan; no, nor afraid to vouch it before God himself, when God in his providence seemed most to disown him, and to handle him as an enemy,—'Thou knowest that I am not wicked,' Job. x. 7. He saith not that he hath no sin, but, in a humble appeal to God, defends his state, that he is not wicked. And this kept the chariot of his hope on its wheels all along his sad sufferings, so that it was never quite overthrown, though sometimes it seemed to totter.

Section I.—But how shall I know whether I have a right to the promises? First, Inquire whether thou art united to Christ by faith or no. The promises are not a common for swine to rout in, but Christ's sheep-walk, for his flock to feed in. 'If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise,' Gal. iii. 29. The promise is the jointure, and cannot be had but by taking the person of Christ in marriage. And faith is the grace by which the soul gives its consent to take Christ as he is held up in the gospel; called, therefore, 'a receiving of Christ.' There is no doubt but thou hast often been wooed in the ministry of the word by Christ's spokesmen, and that question hath been put to thee for Christ, which was once put to Rebecca concerning her taking Isaac to husband,—'Wilt thou go with this man?' They have from the word set him forth in his glories before thee, who he is, and what he brings. Thou hast heard the articles upon which he is most willing to proceed to marriage, and take thee as his beloved into his bed and bosom. As, First, That thou send away all other lovers which have had any pretensions to thee, for he will endure no competitor with him in thy affections. The name of Baalim must be taken out of Israel's mouth, and then God marries himself to her, Hosea ii. 17, 18. Secondly, That thou like his law as well as his love. Christ will not be husband where he may not be master. Thirdly, That thou take him for better and for worse, with his cross as well as with his crown, to suffer for him as well as to reign with him. Now, what entertainment has this found with thee? Dost thou, upon the discovery made of Christ, take liking in his person? Is he transcendently amiable in thy eye and precious to thy soul, so as to inflame thee with an insatiable desire of him? Canst thou freely pack away thy once darling lusts for him, and leap out of the arms of all thy carnal delights and sinful pleasures, to be taken into his embraces? Art thou as willing he should be thy lord as thy love; and as content to bow to his sceptre, as lie in his bosom? In a word, art thou so enamoured with him, that thou now canst not live without him, nor enjoy thyself, except thou mayest enjoy him? Thy heart is wounded with the darts which his love and loveliness have shot into it, and he himself carries the balm about him which alone can heal it. Let him now require what he will at thy hands, nothing he commands shall be denied. If he bids thee leave father and father's house, thou wilt go after him, though it be to the other end of the

Digitized by Google

world: if he tells thee thou must be mean and poor in the world for his sake, thou art resolved to beg with him, rather than reign without him, yea, die for him, than live without him. Come forth, thou blessed of the Lord, and put on the bracelets of the promises; they are the love-tokens which I am to deliver in his name to thee. Thou art the happy soul that Christ betroths to himself. Languish no longer in thy unbelieving fears. For thy comfort know, it is not Christ's custom to entangle souls' affections, and when he has got their love, then to deny his to them, and cast them off.

SECTION II.—Inquire what effect the promises have upon thy soul. All who have a right to the promise are transformed by the promise. As Satan shed his venomous seed into the heart of Eve by a promise, Gen. iii. 4,—'Ye shall not surely die;' whereupon she presently conceived with sin, and was assimilated into the likeness of his diabolical nature,—wicked as the devil himself, so God useth the promises of the gospel, called therefore the immortal seed, to beget his own image and likeness in the hearts of his elect, 2 Pet. i. 4,—'Exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature;' that is, be partakers of such heavenly, holy qualities and dispositions as will make you like God himself. The promises of the gospel have in them a fitness, and (when by the Spirit of God applied) a virtue to purify the heart, as well as to pacify the conscience. 'Now ye are clean,' saith Christ to his disciples, 'through the word which I have spoken to you,' John xv. 3. Lay, therefore, thy hand upon thy heart, and speak freely. Have the promises had a sanctifying, transforming virtue upon thee? What of God dost thou find in thy heart more since thy acquaintance with the promises than before? Some use promises as a protection for sin, rather than an argument against it. As sin takes occasion by the commandment to work in the carnal heart all manner of concupiscence, so many are from the promise emboldened to sin more freely; like mountebanks that drink poison in confidence of their antidote. Now, which way works the promise upon thy heart? If the seal of the promise leaves not the impress of God's image on thee, it ratifies no good to thee. If it produceth no holiness in thee, it brings no joy to thee. In a word, if the promise be not to thee a seed of grace, it is no evidence for glory: but if thou canst find it leaves the superscription of God upon thee, then it assures the love and favour of God to thee.

SECTION III.—Inquire in what posture thy heart stands to the word of command. The promise, may be, is sweet to thy palate; this thou rollest like a lump of sugar under thy tongue, but are not thy teeth set against the command, as if it were gall and wormwood? Thou smilest on the promise, but when put in mind of thy duty to the command thy countenance is changed, and a frown sits on thy brow, as if God were some austere master that breaks his servants' backs with heavy burdens; and thou couldst wish, with all thy heart, that a dispensation might be procured for thee, to break now and then a command without forfeiting thy claim to the promise; but because that is not to be hoped for, thou art so kind to thyself as to give thyself leave to bow down to some idol of pleasure or profit that thou hast set up in thy heart, and hopest God will be merciful to thee because it is only in this or that one way thou makest bold with him in. If this shoe fit thy foot, this be the true character of thy heart, which God forbid! thou hast no lot which belongs to thee in the lap of the promise. We have a comfortable promise, Psalm l. 15, but a guard is set about it, that no disobedient wretch should gather its sweet fruit, ver. 16, 17: 'But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my word behind thee?' On the other hand, if thou canst in truth say, that it is not the holy command thou art offended with, but with thyself, because thou canst not obey it perfectly; that it is not grievous for thee to keep, but to break the laws of God; and though thy foot too often slips, yet thy heart cleaves to them, and will not let thee lie where thou fallest; but up thou gettest to mend thy pace, and mind thy steps better; know, poor soul, this sincere respect thou hast to the commandment is a most comfortable evidence for thy true title to the promise. When David was able to vouch his love to the command, he did not question his title to the promise, Psalm cxix. 113: there he asserts his sincere affection to the precepts,—'I hate vain thoughts, but thy laws do I love.' Mark, he doth not say he is free from vain thoughts, but he hates them;

Digitized by Google

he likes their company no better than a pack of thieves that breaks into his house. Neither saith he that he fully kept the law, but he loved the law even when he failed of exact obedience to it. Now from this testimony which his conscience brought in for his love to the law, his faith acts clearly and strongly on the promise in the next words, 'Thou art my hiding-place, and my shield, I hope in thy word,' ver. 114.

SECTION IV.—If thou questionest thy right to one promise, inquire whether thou canst not discern thy interest in a second, which, if thou canst, thou mayest conclude thou hast a right to the other thou didst doubt of, yea, and to all the rest. For as there is a concatenation of graces, he that finds one, hath all; so of promises, he that is heir to one, hath a right to all. May be when thou readest that promise, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' Matt. v. 8, the remainder of corruption being not yet fully mortified in thy heart, prevents thee from applying it to thyself as thy portion: but as for that, ver. 6, 'Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled,' haply thou feelest such a pinching sense of thy guilt, and want of holiness, as will enforce thee to acknowledge, that if ever man in a burning fever thirsteth for drink, or one half-starved desireth food, then thou dost crave and cry for the righteousness of Christ to justify thy person, and grace from Christ to sanctify thy nature: so that thou canst not but see this promise spoken to thee. And if this belongs to thee, then the former, and all the other with it; for they are branches in the same covenant, which God doth not dismember, but gives it entire with all the branches growing on it to be the believer's portion; hence it is they are called 'heirs of the promise.' Not heirs of this promise or that, but of promise; that is, of the covenant, which comprehends all the promises of the gospel: so that, as he hath hold of the man's whole body, that hath fast hold of his hand, though it be but one member of it, because it is knit to the rest, and by it he may draw the rest to him: so, if thou hast hold of any one promise, thou hast hold of all. And, as one may draw out the wine of a whole hogshead at one tap, so may a poor soul derive the comfort of the whole covenant to himself through one promise, which he is able to apply. 'We know,' saith John 'that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren, 1 John iii. 14. Eternal life is the cream and top of all covenant blessings. Now a poor Christian may, upon the inward feeling of this one grace of love in his heart (being the condition annexed to this promise), know that he is in a state of life and happiness. And why? Because, wherever this grace is in truth, there are all other saving graces; Christ is not divided in these, and consequently, he that can apply this promise, hath a right to all.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FIVE DIRECTIONS MORE UPON THE SAME ACCOUNT.

SECTION I.—Take pains to sort the promises, as thou readest the Scriptures, and reduce them to their proper heads. There is great multiplicity of trials and temptations which God is pleased to exercise his own saints with: 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous,' Psalm xxxiv. 19. And there is variety of promises provided to administer suitable comfort to their sorrows. The Scriptures are a spiritual physic-garden, where grows an herb for the cure of every malady. Now it were of admirable use to the Christian, if he would gather some of every sort, such especially as he hath found most to affect his heart, of which he can say, this portion of Scripture is mine; and then to write such down, as the physician doth his prescriptions for this and that disease by themselves. May it not shame the Christian, to see a scholar know every book in his great library, and what it treats on, so that he can presently go to any one of them, and make use of their notions as he hath occasion; and he who hath but one book to advise with, and that none of the greatest bulk, but sufficient as to make him wise unto salvation, and make him comfortable in every condition that can befall him, should not be acquainted with some choice promises of every sort, to which he may be able to resort for counsel and comfort in the day of his distress? Now the best time for this work is, when thou art yet at ease in the lap of health and prosperity. The apothecary gathers his simples in the spring,

Digitized by Google

which he useth in winter; the mariner provides his tackling in the harbour, before he puts to sea; and the wise Christian will store himself with promises in health for sickness; and in peace, for future perils. It is too late for a man to think of running home for his cloak, when on his way he is catched in a storm. 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished,' Prov. xxii. 3.

SECTION II.—Observe the full latitude of promises. The covenant of grace comprehends the weak Christian as well as the strong; 'If children, then heirs,' Rom. viii. 17: not if children grown to this age, or that stature; but if children. Christ hath in his family children of all sizes; some little, others tall. If thou art a child, though in the cradle, the promise is thy portion. 'All the promises of God in him are, Yea, and in him, Amen,' 2 Cor. i. 20. 'There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,' Rom. viii. 1. See here it is the state and relation the creature stands in that gives him his title to the promise. Some saints have more grace from Christ than others, and so have more skill to improve these promises than their weaker brethren, whereby their present profits and incomes from the promise are greater: but they have no more interest in Christ than the other; and, consequently, the title of the weak Christian is as true to the promise, as of the strong. Shall the foot say, Because I am the lowest member of the body, therefore the tongue will not speak for me, or the head take care of me? We will grant thee to be of the lowest rank of Christians; yet thou art in Christ, as the foot is in the body; and Christ hath made provision in the promise for all that are in him. We disfigure the promises when we make them look asquint, with an eye upon one saint, and not on another, whereas they belong to all: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,' John iii. 36. Who now is there meant? Only he that believes above doubting? Certainly not. He that bids us receive the weak in faith, will not himself reject them.

SECTION III.—Be much in meditation of the promises. Whence is it that the poor Christian is so distressed with the present affliction that lies upon him, but because he museth more on his trouble, than on the promise? There is that in the promise which would recreate his spirit, if he could but fix his thoughts upon it. When the crying child once fastens on the teat, and begins to draw down the milk, then it leaves wrangling, and falls asleep at the breast. Thus the Christian ceaseth complaining of his affliction, when he gets hold on the promise, and hath the relish of its sweetness upon his heart; Psa. xciv. 19, 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.' When a swarm of bees dislodge themselves, they are all in confusion, flying here and there without any order, till at last they are hived again; then the uproar is at an end, and they fall to work peaceably as before—so the Christian will find it with his own heart: God in the promise is the soul's hive; let the Christian dislodge his thoughts thence, and presently they run riot, and fly up and down as in an affright at the apprehension of the present affliction or temptation that lies upon him, till he can recollect himself, and settle his heart again upon the promise, and then he recovers his former peace. Hence the Spirit of God sounds a retreat to the troubled thoughts of afflicted saints, and calls them unto God, where alone they can be quiet, and at ease, Psa. xxxvii. 7: 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.' And David, finding his soul (like the dove while flying over the waters) without repose, calls it back into the meditation of God and his promise, as the only ark where it could find rest; Psa. cxvi. 7, 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul.' The Christian's heart is of that colour, which his most abiding, constant thoughts dye it into. Transient, fleeting thoughts, be they comfortable or sad, do not much work upon the soul, or alter its temper into joy or sorrow. Neither poison kills, nor food nourisheth that doth not stay in the body; no, then the affliction soaks into the heart, and embitters the Christian's spirit into perplexing fears and disconsolate dejections, when his thoughts lie steeping in his sorrows from day to day; when, like her in the gospel, he is bowed down with a spirit of infirmity, that he cannot raise his heart from the thought of his cross and trial, to meditate on any promise that should refresh him. Such there are, whom Satan and their own pensive hearts keep such close prisoners, that no comfortable meditation is suffered to speak or stay with them. Again, on the other hand, then the pro-

Digitized by Google

mise works effectually, when it is bound upon the Christian's heart,—when he wakes with it, and walks with it. No pain which he feels, no danger which he fears, can pluck him from this breast; but as Samson went on his way eating of the honeycomb, so he, feeding on the sweetness of the promise. Here is a Christian that will sing when another sighs; will be able to spend that time of his affliction in praising God, which others (who think only upon what they suffer) too commonly bestow on fruitless complaints of their misery, which reflect dishonourably upon God himself. Let it be thy care, therefore, to practice this duty of meditation. Do not only exchange a few words with the promise, as one does with a friend passing by, but invite the promise, as Abraham did the angels, Gen. xviii., not to pass away, till thou hast more fully enjoyed it: yea, constrain it, as the disciples did Christ, to stay with thee all the night of thy affliction. This is to acquaint ourselves, indeed, with God—the ready way to be at peace. This is the way the saints have taken to raise their faith to such a pitch as to triumph over the most formidable calamities. 'My beloved,' saith the spouse, 'shall lie all night between my breasts:' that is, when benighted with any sorrowful, afflicting providence, she will pass away the night comfortably in the Meditation of his love and loveliness, his beauty and sweetness. Never will the Christian come to any kindly heat of comfort in his spirit, till he takes this Abishag of the promise into his bosom to cherish him. A soul, that hath learned this heavenly art of Meditation, will feel no more the extremity of any affliction than you do the sharpness of the cold weather, when you are sitting by a good fire, or lying in a warm bed. It was a notable speech of Julius Palmer, an English martyr:—'To them,' said he, 'that have their mind fettered to the body, as a thief's foot is to a pair of stocks, it is hard to die; but if any be able to separate his soul from his body, then, by the help of God's Spirit, it is no more mastery for such a one, than to drink this cup.' He meant, if the creature be able to elevate his mind and thoughts above his sufferings, by heavenly meditation on the great and precious promises, then it were nothing to suffer. Such a one's soul is in heaven, and a soul in heaven feels little what the flesh meets with on earth. Here is the most glorious prospect to be seen on this side heaven! When the soul stands upon this Pisgah of meditation, looking by an eye of faith, through the perspective of the promise, upon all the great and precious things laid up by a faithful God for him, it is easy to despise the world's love and wrath; but, alas! it is hard for us to get up thither, who are so short-breathed, and soon tired with a few steps up this mount of God. Oh, let us all cry out, as once David, 'Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!' And with him, in another place, 'Who will bring me into the strong city? Wilt not thou, O God?' So, who will lift us up to this high, holy hill of meditation, higher than all the surging waves that dash upon us from beneath, where we may see all our creature-enjoyments drowned, yet ourselves not wetshod? Our God would do this for us, would we but shake off our sloth, and show, by parting with our mandrakes to purchase his company, that we highly prize the same. My meaning is, would we but frequently retire from the world, and bestow some of that time in secret waiting upon God, which we lavish out upon inferior pleasures, and entertainments of the creature, we should invite God's Holy Spirit to us. Let a wicked man set up a lust for his thoughts to dally with, and the devil will soon be at his elbow to assist him. And shall we not believe the Holy Spirit as ready to lend his helping hand to a holy meditation? Doubtless he is. Spread thou thy sails, and the Spirit will fill them with his heavenly breath: be but thou the priest to lay the wood and sacrifice in order, and fire from heaven will come down upon it. Be thou but careful to provide fuel, gather from the promises matter for meditation, set thy thoughts at work upon it, and the Spirit of God will kindle thy affections. 'While I was musing,' saith David, 'the fire burned,' Psa. xxxix. 3. Isaac met his bride in the fields; and the gracious soul her beloved, when she steps aside, to walk with the promise in her solitary thoughts.

SECTION IV.—Plead the promises at the throne of grace. This must not be disjoined from the former. Indeed, as the ingredients of an excellent receipt do not work the cure severally, but as tempered together; so these directions, being social means, must not be severed, but jointly observed. And this direction I am now speaking to, besides a universal influence it hath upon all the

Digitized by Google

other, if linked by an especial affinity to the former. In vain do we charge the gun, if we intend not to let it off. Meditation filleth the heart with heavenly matter, but prayer gives the discharge, and pours it forth upon God, whereby he is overcome to give the Christian his desired succour. The promise is the bond, wherein God makes himself a debtor to the creature. Now, though it is some comfort to a poor man that hath no money at present to buy bread, when he reads his bills and bonds, to see that he hath a great sum owing him; yet this will not supply his present wants: no, it is the putting his bond in suit must do this. By meditating on the promise, thou comest to see there is support in, and deliverance out of, affliction engaged for; but none will come, till you commence your suit, and by the prayer of faith call in the debt. 'Your heart shall live that seek the Lord,' Psa. lxix. 32. 'They looked unto him, and were lightened,' Psa. xxxiv. 5. God expects to hear from you, before you can expect to hear from him. If you restrain prayer, it is no wonder the mercy promise is retained. Meditation is like the lawyer's studying the case in order to his pleading at the bar: when, therefore, thou hast veiwed the promise, and affected thy heart with the riches of it, then ply thee to the throne of grace, and spread it before the Lord. Thus David, Psa. cxix. 46, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope.'

SECTION V.—When thou hast sued the promise, exert thy faith on the power and truth of God for the performance of it, against sense and reason, which rise up to discourage thee: for, as thy faith is feeble or strong on these, so wilt thou draw little or much sweetness from the promises. The saint's safety lies in the strength and faithfulness of God, who is the promiser; but the present comfort and repose of an afflicted soul is fetched in by faith relying on God as such. Hence it is, though all believers are out of danger, in the saddest condition, yet too many, alas! of them, are under fears and dejections of spirit, because their faith acts weakly on a mighty God, and suspiciously on a faithful God: 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith!' Matt. viii. 26. You see the leak at which the water came in to sink their spirits; they had 'little faith.' It is not what God is in himself, but what our apprehensions at present are of God, that pacifies and comforts a soul in great straits. If a man fear the house will fall on his head in a storm, though it be as immovable as a rock, yet that will not ease his mind till he thinks it so. Were a man under the protection of never so faithful a friend, yet so long as his head is full of fears and jealousies to the contrary, that he will at last leave and cast him off, this man must needs have an uncomfortable life, though without cause. You see, then, of what importance it is to keep up the vigour of thy faith on the power and truth of the promises; and if thou meanest to do this, banish sense and reason from being thy counsellors. How came Abraham not to stagger in his faith, though the promise was so strange? Because 'he considered not his own body,' Rom. iv. 19. And what made Zacharias reel? He made sense his counsellor, and thought he was too old for such news to be true. This is the bane of faith, and consequently of comfort in affliction. We are too prone to carry our faith, like Thomas, at our fingers' ends, and to trust God no farther than our hand of sense can reach. It is not far that sense can reach, and but little farther that reason's purblind eye can see; God is oft on his way to perform a promise, and bring joyful news to his afflicted servants, when sense and reason conclude their case desperate. These three, sense, reason, and faith, are distinct, and must not be confounded. Some things we know by sense, which we do not understand the reason of, as the sympathy of the loadstone with iron, why it draws the baser metal, and not gold; and the mariner's needle espousing the north point rather than any other. Some things we apprehend by reason, that are not discerned by sense; as the magnitude of the sun's body to exceed the circumference of the earth, which, the eye being judge, may be almost covered with one's hat. And other things clear to faith, that pose both sense and reason. Paul knew by faith in that dismal sea-storm, where all hope of being saved was taken away (that is, sense and reason being judges), not a man should lose his life, Acts xxvii. 25, 'Be of good cheer, for I believe that it shall be even as it was told me.' When the angel smote Peter on the side, and bade him 'arise quickly, and follow me,' he did not allow sense and reason to reply, and cavil at the impossibility of the thing; how can I walk that am in fetters?

Digitized by Google

or to what purpose, when an iron gate withstands us? But he riseth, and his chains fall off; he follows, and the iron gate opens itself to them. Say not, poor Christian, it is impossible to bear this affliction, or pass that temptation; let faith follow the promise, and God will loose these knots that sense and reason tie. Luther bids us crucify that word 'wherefore.' Obey the command, and ask not a reason why God enjoins it. It is as necessary to bid the Christian, in great afflictions and temptations, to crucify the word *quomodo*: how shall I go through this trouble,—hold out in that assault? Away with this 'how shall I?' Hath not the great God, who is faithful, given thee promises enough to ease thy heart of these needless fears and cares, in that he tells thee he will never leave thee nor forsake thee; his grace shall be sufficient for thee; nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and a hundred more as comfortable assurances from the lip of truth to stand between thee and all harm. Why, then, dost thou trouble thyself about this improbability and mountainous difficulty that sense and carnal reason heave up, and interpose to eclipse thy comfort from thy approaching deliverance? Judge not by sense, but by faith on an omnipotent God, and these bugbears will not scare thee. It is the highest act of our understanding to believe those things which seem most improbable; as it is the highest act of love, for Christ's sake, to take pleasure in those things that bring pain and shame with them. For as in the latter we deny ourselves the satisfaction of our carnal desires, which goes near to flesh and blood; so in the former, we deny our carnal reasonings, that would be disputing against God's power and strength.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WHOLE DISCOURSE ON THIS PIECE SHUT UP WITH AN EXHORTATION TO THE MINISTERS, TO WHOM THIS SWORD IS ESPECIALLY COMMITTED.

To the ministers' hands this sword of the word is given in an especial manner: unto you the ministry of it is committed. God hath not left it at random to all, that who will may publicly preach the gospel. That which is every body's work is nobody's: he hath, therefore, set up a standing office, with officers in his church, on whom he hath laid this burden, and from whom he expects an account, 2 Cor. v. 19: 'He hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation,' as a prince commissions this or that man to be his ambassador. 'O Timothy! keep that which was committed to thy trust,' 1 Tim. vi. 20. See here, and tremble at the charge which is deposited in your hands. You are ambassadors from the great God, to treat with poor sinners concerning their eternal peace upon those articles which are contained in the gospel. You are his under-workmen, to rear up his temple in the hearts of men, and to lay every stone by the line and rule of his word: his stewards, to give his family their portions in due season, and all your provision to be taken out of this storehouse. In a word, you are his shepherds, to lead and feed his flock, and that in no other than these green pastures. Now if the peace be not concluded, the ambassador is sure to be called to account where the fault lies. If the house be not built, or go to decay, woe to the negligent workman. If the family starve, what reckoning will the steward make? If the sheep wander, or die of the rot, through thy neglect, who shall pay for the loss but the idle shepherd? Now, in order to the discharge of this your public trust, I shall point out two duties incumbent on you, with reference to this work. One to be performed in your study, the other in your pulpit.

SECTION I.—In your study acquaint yourselves with the word of God. That which may pass for diligence in a private Christian's search into the Scriptures, may be charged as negligence upon the minister. The study of the Scriptures is not only a part of our general calling, in common with him, but of our particular also, in which we are to be exercised from one end of the week to the other. The husbandman doth not more constantly go forth with his spade to perform his daily labour in the field, than the minister is to go and dig in this mine of the Scripture. He is not to read a chapter now and then, as his worldly occasions will permit, or steal a little time from his other studies to look into the Bible *in transitu*, and bid it farewell; but it must be his standing exercise, his regular work: all other must gave way to this. Suppose thou shouldst know what

Digitized by Google

Plato, Aristotle, with the rest of the princes of worldly learning, have written, and hadst encircled all the arts within thy circumference, but art unskilful in the word of righteousness, thou wouldst be Paul's unlearned person, as unfit to be a minister as he that hath read all the body of the law is to be a physician, if ignorant of this art. I do not here intend to nourish the vain conceit of those sons of ignorance, who think human learning unnecessary for a minister's furniture. Truly, without this we should soon run into the barbarism of former times. I have read of one Beda, that dissuaded Francis the First, a French king, (and that when learned Budæus was present,) from his princely resolution of setting up professors of languages in his university, saying the Greek tongue was the fountain of all heresies; but the man was found to understand not a word of Greek himself. Indeed, few or none will speak against learning, but those that have not so much of it as to make them understand its use. I dare not bid ministers (as some fanatics have done) burn all their books but the Bible. No, but I would exhort them to prefer it above all their other books, and to direct all their other studies to furnish them with Scripture knowledge; as the bee that flies over the whole garden, and brings all the honey she gets from every flower therein into her hive, so should the minister run over all his other books, and reduce their notions for his help in this: as the Israelites offered up the jewels and ear-rings, borrowed of the Egyptians, to the service of the tabernacle. And certainly there are such jewels to be borrowed even from them, as may become the heart of a Christian, so they are refined and gospelized. Thus the captive virgin, Deut. xxi. 10, when her head was shaved, her nails pared, and her garments changed, might be taken into an Israelite's bosom. Religion and learning revived together. The light which Erasmus brought into the schools helped Luther's labours in the church. O let us that are ministers of the gospel give up ourselves to the study of the word! We are, as one well calls us, but younger brethren to the apostles. Ministerial gifts were left them by Christ, as the inheritance by the father to his eldest son and heir. But we must work for our living. They had their knowledge of the word, as Jacob his venison, brought to their hand without hunting; but if we will know the mind of God, we must trace it out by our diligence, but ever taking prayer in our company. This I am sure was Paul's charge to Timothy,—'Give attendance to reading,' 1 Tim. iv. 13. Follow thy book close, O Timothy! And, ver. 15, 'Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them.' And mark why,—'That thy profiting may appear to all;' that is, that thou mayest appear to be a growing preacher to those that hear thee. O how shall the people grow, if the minister doth not? and how shall he grow if he doth not daily drink in more than he pours out? That minister's flock must feel want, if he hath no supply from a constant trade in his study. If the nurse doth not feed herself well, she may soon bring herself and child into a consumption. As we would not, therefore, see the souls that hang on our breasts languish for want of milk, or ourselves faint in our work, let us endeavour to get supplies equal to our wants. Study and pray, pray and study again. Think not your work is done for all the week when the Sabbath is past. Take a little breath, and return to thy labour; as the seedsman that sits down at the land's end to rest himself awhile, and then rises up to go before his plough again. We have reason to be more choice of our time than others, because it is less our own: there are none in thy parish but have a share in it. We are thieves to our people's souls when we do not husband it to their best advantage. All are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas; yours for the service of your faith. Is the parent bound to husband his estate and time for the provision of his children? And should not the spiritual father have as natural an affection to his people? If they understood how great a labour this must needs be, both to the mind and body, they would both more pity and encourage their minister in their work. God move your hearts to it, whom he hath blest with faithful labourers: help them in their study for you, by easing them of their wordly cares for themselves. Some may thank themselves that their provisions are so mean, by being accessory to the minister's distractions in his work, and diversion from his calling; for by their oppression, or purloining his livelihood, they force him in a manner to turn worldling; and the time which he should spend in providing bread for their souls, is laid out to get bread for his family's bodies.

Digitized by Google

Section II.—In the pulpit use no others word but this, and handle it faithfully. Remember whose errand thou bringest.

First, Purely, and that in a threefold respect. First, Pure from error. Think it not enough that your text is Scripture, but let your whole sermon be agreeable thereto. Thou art an ambassador, and as such, bound by thy instructions. Take heed of giving thy own dreams and fancies in God's name, Jer. xxiii. 28; 'He that hath my word, let him speak it faithfully;' that is, purely, without mingling it with his own dreams: so he expounds himself,—'What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.' All is chaff, except the pure word of God; and why should it be blended with it? Such an one may fear lest God from heaven should give him the lie while he is in the pulpit. O stamp not God's image on thine own coin! We live in high-flown times; many people are not content with truths that lie plainly in the Scriptures; and some, to please their wanton palates, have sublimated their notions so high, that they have flown out of the sight of the Scripture, and unawares run themselves, with others, into dangerous errors. Be well assured it is a truth, before thou acquaintest thy people with it. If thou wilt play the mountebank, choose not the pulpit for thy stage. Make not experiments upon the souls of thy people, by delivering what is doubtful, and hath not undergone the trial of this furnace. Better feed thy people with sound doctrine, though it be a plain meal, than that thou shouldst, with an outlandish dish, light on a wild gourd, that brings death into their pot. Secondly, Pure from passion. The pulpit is an unseemly place to vent our discontent and passions in. Beware of this strange fire. The man of God must be gentle and meek, and his words with meekness of wisdom. The oil makes the nail drive without splitting the board. The word never enters the heart more kindly, than when it falls most gently: 'Ride thou prosperously, because of truth and meekness,' Psa. xlv. 4. Be as rough to thy people's sins as thou canst, so thou be gentle to their souls. Dost thou take the rod of reproof into thine hand? Let them see that love, not wrath, gives the blow. Nurses are careful that they do not heat their milk, knowing it will breed ill blood in the child that sucks it. The word preached, comes, indeed, best from a warm heart; but if there goes a feverish heat withal, it breeds ill blood in the hearer's thoughts, and prejudice to the person makes him dislike the milk. I speak not against the minister's zeal, so that it be from above, pure and peaceable. Save all thy heat for God; spend it not in thy own cause. Admirable was the meekness of Moses in this respect. An high affront he received at the hands of Aaron and Miriam, Numb. xii. 2: he did not retort upon them, it was his own cause, and it was enough that God heard it: but when a sin was committed immediately against God, this meek man could be all in a flame. He may take most liberty in reproving his people's sins against God, that takes liberty in his own cause. Thirdly, Pure from levity and vanity. The word of God is too sacred a thing, and preaching too solemn a work, to be toyed and played with, as is the usage of some, who make a sermon but matter of wit and fine oratory. Their sermon is like a child's doll, from which if you take its dress, the rest is worth nothing; unpin this story, take off that gaudy phrase, and nothing is left in the discourse. If we mean to do good, we must come, and not only in word, but with power. Satan moves not for a thousand such squibs and wit-cracks. Draw therefore, the sword out of thy scabbard, and strike with its naked edge; this you will find the only way to pierce your people's consciences, and fetch blood of their sins. I do not hear speak against the use of those parts which God hath given unto any; nor against the fitting our discourse so as it may most insinuate itself into our people's affections, and steal into their hearts, by the gratefulness it finds with their ear. This is our duty; Eccles. xii. 9, 'Because the preacher was wise, he sought to find out acceptable words.' Not rude, loose, and indigested stuff, in a slovenly manner brought forth, lest the sluttery of the cook should turn the stomachs of the guests. The apothecary mixeth his potion, so as his patient may take it down with less regret, if not with delight; but still he hath a care that he weakens not its purging operation, by making it over-pleasant to the palate. As they were 'acceptable words,' so upright,—'words of truth,' ver. 10.

Secondly, As purely, so freely. O, take heed of enslaving the word of God

Digitized by Google

to thy own lust, or another's will, though the greatest in thy parish! In a steward it is required, that he be faithful, 1 Cor. iv. 2. Now, the preacher's faithfulness stands in relation to him that intrusts him. It is very unlikely that a steward, in giving out provision, should please all the servants in the house; such officers have least thanks when they do their work best. He that thinks to please men, goes about an endless and needless work. Man's words will not break thy bones. A wise physician seeks to cure, not to please his patient. He that chides when he is sick, for the bitterness of the potions, will give thee thanks for it when he is recovered. The apostle passeth by the thoughts of men as a thing inconsiderable, not worthy the interrupting of him in his work. 'With me it is a very small thing I should be judged of you,' ver. 3: as if he had said, It shall be known at the great audit, when my Master comes to reckon with me, whether I have been faithful: and it is time enough to have my name righted, when he will vindicate his own. No doubt it was a great temptation to Micaiah, when Ahab's messenger endeavoured to persuade him to let his message be such as would please the king; but mark his noble answer,—'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith, that will I speak.' Some think Micaiah was that disguised prophet that denounced judgment against Ahab for Benhadad's dismission, and that now he was fetched out of prison; for the king bids, 'Carry him back unto Amon, the governor,' 1 Kings xxii. 26. If so, then Micaiah had the opportunity, by one flattering sermon, to have got his liberty as well as the king's favour: yet to the dungeon he will go again, rather than prostitute the word to Ahab's lust. Blessed Paul was of the same mind, 2 Tim. ii. 9: 'Wherein' (speaking of the gospel) 'I suffer trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds, but the word of God is not bound:' as if he had said, They shall never make me enslave that, neither in prison nor at the block. No doubt Paul might have been free, could he have been content the word should have been bound: but he was too faithful to procure his liberty with imprisonment of the truth by a sinful silence. If ever it was a time of temptation to ministers, and there were need to stir them up, to keep the word of God's patience, it is in these last days of the world, of which it is prophesied, 'Men shall not endure sound doctrine.' Now, therefore, to bear witness to the truth, and to make full proof of their ministry in such a perverse and froward generation, needs more greatness of spirit than flesh and blood can help them to. It is no trial for a minister to speak truth freely among his friends; but among those that despise it, and are enraged with the messenger for delivering his errand. This made the confession of our Lord so glorious, 1 Tim. vi. 13. It was before Pontius Pilate, a bloody enemy against him and the truth, he witnessed. Therefore, our people may well bear with us when we speak freely in God's name; yea, though we come upon their ground, and our message rifles their consciences. We have it in our commission; Jer. vi. 27, 'I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way.' If a warrant is in a constable's hand to search your house, you cannot be angry with him for doing his office, because you dare not stand between him and the displeasure of his prince, should he neglect it.

EPHESIANS VI. 18.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

We have at last set before you the Christian in his armour; and now he wants nothing to furnish him for the battle, or enable him for the victory, but the presence of his general to lead him on, and bring him honourably off again, by his wisdom: which, that he may obtain, the apostle sets him to prayer,—'Praying always,' &c. As if he had said, You have now, Christian, the armour of God; but take heed you forget not to engage the God of this armour by humble prayer for your assistance, lest for all this you be worsted in the fight. He that gives you the arms, can only teach you to use them, and enable you to overcome. I am not ignorant that some make prayer a piece of armour, and reckon it as a part of the panoply. It matters not much in what notion we handle it, whether as a distinct piece of armour, or as a duty and means neces-

Digitized by Google

sarily required to the use of our armour. The latter I shall follow, partly because it hath no piece of material armour allotted to it for a resemblance; as also, by the connexion it hath with the whole discourse of the armour, it seems to be superadded as a general duty influential upon all the pieces before named, and may be read with every piece: take the girdle of truth, praying with all prayer, &c.: having on the breastplate of righteousness, praying with all prayer, &c. The Christian's armour will rust, except it be furbished with the oil of prayer. What the key is to the watch, prayer is to our graces,—it winds them up, and sets them going. In the words observe,—First, The duty commanded, —Prayer; with the end for which it is appointed, namely, as a help to all his graces and means to carry on his war against sin and Satan. Secondly, A directory for prayer, wherein we are instructed how to perform this duty, in six distinct heads. First, The time for prayer,—'Praying always.' Secondly, The kinds and sorts of prayer,—'With all prayer and supplication.' Thirdly, The inward principle of prayer, from which it must flow,—'In the Spirit.' Fourthly, The guard to be set about the duty of prayer,—'Watching thereunto.' Fifthly, The unwearied constancy to be exercised in the duty,—'With perseverance.' Sixthly, The comprehensiveness of the duty, or persons for whom we are to pray,—'For all saints.'

CHAPTER I.

PRAYER'S USEFULNESS AND NECESSITY FOR THE SAINT'S DEFENCE IN HIS WARFARE SHEWN, AND ONE REASON GIVEN OF THE POINT.

We begin with the first, the duty in general, together with the connexion it hath with the whole preceding discourse of the armour, implied in the participle, 'praying;' that is, furnish yourselves with the armour of God, and join prayer to all these graces for your defence against your spiritual enemies.

Section I.—Prayer is a necessary duty to be performed by the Christian, and used with all other means in his spiritual warfare. This is the silver trumpet, by the sound of which he is to alarm heaven, and call in God to his succour, Numb. x. 35. The saint's enemies will not fall till God riseth; and God stays to be raised by his prayers, Psa. lxviii. 1;—'Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered.' Prayer is a duty and means to be made use of in all our affairs. What bread and salt are to our table, prayer is to the Christian in all his undertakings, enjoyments, and temptations. Whatever our meal is, bread and salt are set on the board; and whatever our condition is, prayer must not be forgot. As we dip all our morsels in salt, and eat them with bread, so we are to exercise every grace, season every enjoyment, mingle every duty, and oppose every temptation with prayer. It hath been the constant practice of the saints, in all their dangers and straits, whether from sin, devils, or men, to betake themselves to the throne of grace, and draw a line of prayer about them; accounting this the only safe posture to stand in for their defence. When God called Abraham from Haran into a strange country, where he wandered from place to place amidst strangers, who could not but have him in some suspicion, and this created many dangers to this holy man from the kings round about; now observe what course Abraham takes for his defence: you shall find in his removals, the memorable thing recorded of him, is, that he 'erected an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord,' Gen. xii. 7, 8; xiii. 3, 4. This was the breastwork he raised, and intrenched himself in. When he had once by prayer cast himself into the arms of God for protection, then he made account that he was in his castle. But what need Abraham put himself so often to this trouble? Had he not the security of God's promise when he set forth, that God would bless them that blessed him, and curse them that cursed him? And had he not faith to believe God would perform what he promised? Both. But neither God's promise nor Abraham's faith gave any license to supersede his duty of prayer. The promise is given as a ground of faith, and faith as an encouraging help in prayer; but neither intended to discharge us of our duty, and save us the labour of that work. And what Abraham did, the same have all the saints ever done. The great spoils which they ever got from their enemies, was in the field of prayer. If Moses sends Joshua into the valley against Amalek, himself will be on the mount to storm heaven by prayer, while he is engaged in fight

Digitized by Google

with the enemy below; and the victory, it is plain, was not got by Joshua's sword, so much as by Moses's prayer. Jehoshaphat, when he had near a million of men mustered for the field besides his garrisons, yet we find him praying as earnestly, as if he had not had a man; 'We know not what to do, but our eyes are upon thee,' 2 Chron. xx. 12. Now, if these worthies, when they had but flesh and blood, men like themselves, to contest with, did yet fetch in their help from heaven, and make such use of prayer, and that when other helps were not wanting, lest they should be found under the neglect of an indispensable duty and prevalent means in order to their defence; how much more doth it behove the Christian, both in point of duty and prudence, to take the same course in his spiritual war against principalities and powers! For the saint's graces, when best trained and exercised, are without prayer far less able to stand against Satan, than they, with their military preparation, were to repel the force of men like themselves. 'Watch and pray,' saith our Saviour, 'lest you enter into temptation,' Matt. xxvi. 41. They, not keeping this pass, gave the enemy, Satan, a fair occasion to come in upon them; for we see, not taking Christ's counsel, they were all (though holy men) shamefully foiled. Most of them shifted for themselves by a cowardly flight, while they left their Lord in his enemies' hands: and he that thought to shew more courage than his fellows, at last came off with deeper guilt and shame than them all, by denying his Master, who was even then owing him in the face of death, yea, his Father's wrath. And it is observable, that as they were led into temptation through their neglect of prayer, so they were rescued and led out of it again by Christ's prayer, which he mercifully laid in before-hand for them, Luke xxii. 32: 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.' But that which above all commends this duty to us, is Christ's own practice, who, besides his constant exercise in it, did upon any great undertaking, wherein he was to meet opposition from Satan and his instruments, much more abound in it. At his baptism, being now to enter the stage of his public ministry, and to make his way thereunto through the furious assaults of Satan, with whom he was to grapple, as it were hand to hand, after his forty days' solitude, we find him at prayer, Luke iii. 21; which prayer had a present answer, heaven opening, and the Spirit descending on him, with this voice, saying, 'Thou art my well-beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased,' ver. 22. And now Christ marcheth forth undauntedly to meet his enemy, who waited for him in the wilderness. Again, when he intended to commission his apostles, and send them forth to preach the gospel, which he knew would bring the lion mad out of his den, also the world's wrath upon those his messengers; he first directs them to pray, Matt. ix. 38; and then spends the whole night himself in the same work, Luke vi. 12. But, above all, when he was to fight his last battle with the prince of this world, and conflict with the wrath of his Father, now armed against him, and ready to be poured upon him for man's sin, (whose cause he had espoused,) on the success of which depended the saving or losing his mediatory kingdom, O, how then did he bestir himself in prayer! It is said, 'He prayed more earnestly.' As a wrestler that strains every vein in his body, so he put forth his whole might, 'with strong cries and tears to him that was able to save him from death,' Heb. v. 7; and was heard, so that he won the field, though he was himself slain upon the place; the spoils of which glorious victory believers now divide, and shall enjoy to all eternity. And what is the end of all this, but to shew us the necessity and prevalency of prayer? Without this we cannot gain a victory, though we have our armour; but this, with that, will make us conquerors over all.

SECTION II.—Now we proceed to shew why prayer is so necessary a means with our other armour for our defence. The first reason is taken from the co-ordination of this duty, with all other means for the Christian's defence, and that by divine appointment. He that bids us 'take the girdle of truth, breastplate of righteousness,' &c., commands us also not to neglect this duty. Now, what God joins we must not sever. The efficacy of co-ordinate means lies in their conjunction. The force of an army lies not in this troop or in that one regiment, but in all the parts in a body. And if any single troop or company shall presume to fight the enemy alone, what can they expect but to be routed by the enemy, and punished by their general also? Let not any say, they use this means, and that; if any one be willingly neglected, the golden

Digitized by Google

chain of obedience is broke. And as to a good action, there is required a concurrence of all the several ingredients and causes; so to make a good Christian, there is required a conscientious care to use all appointed means: he must follow the Lord fully, not to make here a balk, and there a furrow. It is not the least of Satan's policy, to get between one duty and another, that the man may not unite his forces, and be uniform in his endeavour. There are few so bad as to use no means, and not many so faithful to God and themselves as conscientiously to use all. One pretends to sincerity, and dares appeal to God that he means well, and his heart is good; but for the breastplate of righteousness, it is too heavy and cumbersome for him to wear. Another seems very just and righteous, so that he would not wrong his neighbour, no not of one penny to gain many pounds; but as for faith in Christ, this he never looks after. A third boasts of his faith and hope, as if he did not doubt of his salvation; but as for the word of God, that should beget and increase it, he cares not how seldom he looks on it at home, or hears it in public. And a fourth, he hath this to say for himself, that he is a constant hearer, his seat at church is seldom found empty, and at home the Bible is often in his hands; but as for prayer, his closet bears witness against him, that he seldom or never performs it. This half-doing will prove many a soul's undoing. Samuel asked Jesse, Are here all thy children? Though but a stripling wanting, he must be sent for, before he will sit down. So I may say to many that are very busy and forward in some particular duties and means, Is here all that God hath given thee in charge? If but one be wanting, God's blessing will be wanting also. And as that son was wanting of Jesse's, which God did intend to set the crown upon, so that duty and means which is most neglected, we have cause to think is the means which God would especially crown with his blessing upon our faithful endeavour.

CHAPTER II.

THE INFLUENCE PRAYER HATH ON ALL THE GRACES OF A SAINT SHEWN.

The second is taken from the influence that prayer hath upon all our graces, in a double respect. It will help to evidence the truth of grace, and also advance its growth.

Section I.—This duty, frequently and spiritually performed, will be a means to evidence the truth of our graces. And this is of no small importance to the Christian, when he hath to do with the tempter; for that which he mainly drives at, is to bring the Christian into a suspicion of himself, as to the work of grace in him, thereby to overturn the very foundation of his hope, and put him to stand in his endeavours. He, indeed, will have little comfort in going on who fears that he is not in his right way. I have heard that politicians can make use of a state lie, though the credit of it lasts but a little while for great advantage to their designs. And he that learns them this art, makes much more use of it himself to farther his designs against the Christian. Because he could not keep Christ in the grave, therefore he raiseth a lie to hinder the belief of his resurrection in the world. And when he cannot hinder the production of grace, he misreports the work to the Christian, as if all were a cheat put upon him by his own deceitful heart, which the poor creature is prone enough to believe; and so, though the fear be groundless, yet being believed, it produceth as sad a confusion to his thoughts, and distress to his spirit, as if it were true. Jacob could not have mourned more if Joseph had been slain, than he did when there was no such matter; nor could a wicked wretch easily endure more terror and horror, than some precious saints have felt, for the time that Satan's false report (slandering the truth of their grace) hath found credit with them. Now in prayer the Christian stands at great advantage to find out the truth of his state, and that upon a double account. First, God commonly takes this season, when his people are pouring out their souls to him, to open his heart to them, and to give his testimony both to their persons and graces. God hath his sealing hours, in which his Spirit comes and bears witness to his children's state and grace; and this of prayer is a principal one. Where was it that God so marvellously dignified and knighted Jacob with that new title of honour, 'Thou shalt be called Israel,' but in the field of prayer? What was the happy hour in which the angel knocked at Daniel's door to let him know how God loved him? Was it

Digitized by Google

not when he was knocking at heaven's door by his prayer?—'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved.' When got the woman of Canaan the sight of her faith, not only that it was true, but strong,—'O woman, great is thy faith?' but when her heart was carried forth so vehemently in prayer? Yea, Christ himself heard that miraculous voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son,' when he was lifting up his voice in prayer to heaven, Luke iii. 21. Secondly, The duty of prayer affords a demonstrative argument for the truth of that soul's grace which spiritually performs it. The Spirit of God, when he testifies to the truth of a saint's grace, useth to join issue with the saint's own spirit, Rom. viii. 16: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits.' Now the testimony which the Christian's own spirit gives for him is taken from those vital acts of the new creature that operate in him, as sincerity, godly sorrow for sin, love of holiness, &c. Now, no way do these and other graces more sensibly discover themselves to the Christian's view than in prayer. Here sincerity shews itself in the Christian's plain-heartedness to confess all his sins, freely without extorting, and nakedly without reserve. When there is no secret drawer in the cabinet of the soul to lock up a darling sin, David, Psa. xxxii. 1, having pronounced him blessed that hath no sin imputed to him, and in whose spirit there is no guile, ver. 5, gives this instance of his sincerity, that he acknowledged his sin, and did not hide his iniquity; also how well he sped thereby,—'And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Again, here the Christian gives vent to his heart, aching with inward grief for sin. Prayer is the channel into which godly sorrow pours forth itself, and runs down in brinish tears, while the Christian is accusing himself of, and judging himself for, his abominations with deep shame and self-abhorrency. In a word, here the soul's love to holiness flames forth in his fervent, vehement desires and requests for grace that can bear no denial, but even breaks for the longing it hath to it. Thus we see a spirit of prayer is both an argument of true grace, and a means to draw out that grace into action, whereby its truth may be the better exposed to view. 'A spirit of grace and of supplication' are both joined together, Zech. xii. 10: the latter indicates the former. What is prayer, but the breathing forth of that grace which is breathed into the soul by the Holy Spirit? When God breathed into man the breath of life he became a living soul; so when God breathes into the creature the breath of spiritual life, it becomes a praying soul:—'Behold, he prayeth,' saith God of Paul to Ananias, Acts ix. 11. As if he had said, Be not afraid of him, he is an honest soul, thou mayest trust him, for he prays. Praying is the same to the new creature, as crying is to the natural. The child is not learned by art to cry, but by nature,—it comes into the world crying. Praying is not a lesson got by forms and rules of art, but flowing from principles of new life.

Section II.—As it is a means to evidence, so to increase grace. The praying Christian is the thriving Christian; whereas he that is slothful in praying in a waster. He is like one that lives at a great expense, and has little or no trade to maintain it.

Now, prayer helps towards the increase and growth of grace two ways. First, As it draws the habits of grace into exercise: now, as exercise brings a double benefit to the body, so it does to the soul. 1. Exercise doth help to digest or breathe forth those humours that clog the spirits. One that stirs little we see, grows pursy, and is soon choked up with phlegm, which exercise clears the body of. Prayer is the saint's exercise-field, where his graces are breathed; it is as the wind to the air, it brightens the soul; as bellows to the fire, which clears the coal of those ashes that smother them. The Christian, while in this world, lives in an unwholesome climate; one while, the delights of it deaden and dull his love to Christ: another while, the trouble he meets in it damps his faith on the promise. How now should the Christian get out of these distempers, had he not a throne of grace to resort to, where, if once his soul be in a melting frame, he (like one laid in a kindly sweat) soon breathes out the malignity of his disease, and comes into his right temper again? How often do we find the holy prophet, when he first kneels down to pray, full of fears and doubts, who, before he and the duty part, grows into a sweet familiarity with God, and repose in his own spirit! Psa. xiii. 1., he begins his prayer as

Digitized by Google

if he thought God would never give him a kind look more: 'How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?' But by that time he had exercised himself a little in duty his distemper wears off, the mists scatter, and his faith breaks out as the sun in its strength,—ver. 5, 6; 'I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation; I will sing unto the Lord.' Thus his faith lays the cloth, expecting a feast ere long to be set on: he that now questioned whether he should ever hear good news from heaven, is so strong in faith as to make himself merry with the hopes of that mercy, which he is assured will come at last. Abraham began with fifty, but his faith got ground on God every step, till he brought down the price of their lives to ten. 2. Exercise whets the appetite to that food which must be taken before strength can be got; and the hone that sets an edge on the husbandman's scythe, helps him to mow the grass. None comes so sharp set to the word (which is the saint's food to strengthen his grace) as the Christian that takes prayer in his way to the ordinance. The stronger natural heat is, the better stomach the man hath to his meat: love in the soul is what natural heat is in the body; the more the soul loves the word, the more craving it is after it. Now as exercise stirs up the natural heat of the body, so prayer excites this spiritual heat of love in the saint's bosom to the word. Cornelius we find hard at prayer in his house, when behold a vision that bids him send to Peter, who should preach the gospel to him,—a happy reward for his devotion. Now see what a sharp appetite this praying soul hath to the word: he, upon this, sends away messengers for Peter, and before he comes, gathers an assembly together; there he sits, with a longing heart, waiting for the preacher. As soon as he sees his face, he falls down at his feet, receiving him with that reverence and respect, as if he had been an angel from heaven. Presently he sets Peter to work; though some may think it was not good treatment in putting him to labour, after so long a journey, before he had refreshed him; but the good man was so hungry to hear the message he brought, that he could not well pacify his soul to stay any longer, and, like a man truly hunger-bit, he is ready to catch at any truth which shall be set before him, Acts x. 33; 'Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' And when the sermon is done, so savoury and sweet was the meal, that he is loth to think of parting with Peter before he gets more from him, and therefore beseeches him to stay some days with him; one sermon but made his teeth water for another. O, how unlike are they who come reeking out of the world to a sermon, to Cornelius, that riseth from prayer to wait for the preacher!

Section III.—Prayer helps our grace, as it sets the soul nigh to God. In prayer we are said to draw near to God, James iv. 8: to come before his presence: in it we have access to the Father, Eph. ii. 18: as one that brings a petition to a prince, is called into his presence-chamber: one of the nearest approaches to God which the creature is capable of, on this side heaven, which was signified by the incense-altar, that stood so high even within the veil. Prayer is called, 'The throne of grace:' we come in prayer to the throne of God, and put our petition into the very hand of God, as he sits on his throne in all his royalty. Now, as prayer is so near an approach to God, it hath a double influence to the growth of the saint's grace. First, By it the soul is put the more into an holy fear of that pure and piercing eye of God, which he sees looking on him. It is true, God is ever near us: pray or not pray, we cannot rid ourselves of his presence: but never hath the soul such apprehensions of his presence, as when it is before God in prayer. Now the soul speakes to God, as it were, mouth to mouth; and considering how holy that Majesty is with whom he hath to do in prayer, he must needs reverence and tremble before him. Now the natural issue of this holy fear is a care to approve itself to God. And this care cherishes every grace; they are carried in its arms, as the child in its nurse's; it keeps the girdle of truth buckled close about his loins. O, saith the soul, I must either leave praying, or leave doubting and juggling with God by hypocrisy. It will strengthen the breastplate of holiness; it is not possible that a Christian should walk loosely all day, and be free and familiar with God at night. He that waits on a prince, will be careful to carry nothing about him that should be offensive to his eye, yea, afraid least anything should come to his ear that should bring him under a cloud in his thoughts, and remove him from his place;

Digitized by Google

for courtiers have those that will be always undermining them if they can; and Satan is at the right hand of the Christian, at every miscarriage, to accuse him unto God, saying, This is your favourite, though he be so devout in prayer; he can do this or that, when the duty is over: and therefore if any have a tie upon them more than others, to walk exactly, it is they that minister before the Lord in this duty. Princes are more curious of their attendants, than of others at farther distance from them. When David shewed some distraction of mind before king Achish, he bids—'Away with him! have I need of madmen, that you bring such a one into my presence?' And does a poor mortal man, that sits on a throne of dust, take such state on him, as not to bear the discomposure of any before him? How much less will the great God brook any unholy behaviour in those that wait so nigh upon him! This, no doubt, made Cain run so fast from the presence of God, because he knew that there was no standing so nigh God with such an unholy heart as he carried in his bosom. Secondly, By the soul's near access to God in prayer, it receives sweet influences of grace from God. All grace comes from the God of grace; not only the first seed of grace, but its growth also; and God usually sheds forth his grace in a way of communion with his people. Now by prayer the Christian is led into most intimate communion with God, and from communion follows communication. As the warmth the chicken finds by sitting under the hen's wings cherisheth it, so are the saints' graces enlivened and strengthened by the sweet influences they receive from close communion with God. The Christian is compared to a tree, Psa. i. 3, and those trees flourish most, and bear the sweetest fruit, which stand most in the sun. The praying Christian stands nigh to God, and hath God nigh to him in all that he calls upon him for. Therefore you may expect his fruit to be sweet and ripe, when another that stands, as it were, in the shade, and at a distance from God, (through neglect of, or infrequency in this duty,) will have little fruit found on its branches, and that but green and sour. 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing,' Psa. xcii. 13, 14.

CHAPTER III.

PRAYER'S PREVALENCY WITH GOD. THE THIRD REASON GIVEN.

THE third reason why the Christian should join prayer to all other means, is taken from the great prevalency prayer hath with God. He will do no great matter for a saint without prayer, and nothing is too great for him to do at his request. Prayer, like Jonathan's bow, (when duly qualified as to the person and act,) never returns empty. Never was faithful prayer lost at sea. No merchant trades with such certainty as the praying saint. Some prayers, indeed, have a longer voyage than others, but then they come with the richer lading at last. In trading, he gets most by his commodity that can do without his money longest. So the Christian that can with most patience stay for a return of prayer, shall never be ashamed of his waiting. The promise insures an answer to his prayer; 1 John iii. 22. O, who can express the powerful oratory of a believer's prayer! This little word 'Father,' lisped forth in prayer by a child of God, exceeds the eloquence of a Demosthenes, Cicero, and all other famed orators. We read of taking heaven by force, Matt. xi. 12. If ever this may be said to be done, it is by prayer, saith Tertulian. We knock at heaven, and the merciful heart of God flies open, which we bring away with us. The same speaks of Christians, how they went to pray, as an army doth to besiege a town, and take it by storm: and then adds, This holy violence that we offer to God in prayer is very pleasing to him. Surely, if it were not, he would neither help the Christian in the work, nor reward him for it when done; whereas he doth both. He helped Jacob to overcome; Hosea xii. 3, 'By his strength he had power with God;' that is, not by his own, but the strength he had from God. And then he puts honour upon him for the victory, Gen. xxxii. 28: 'Thy name shall not be called Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.' It were easy here to enter into a large history of the great exploits which prayer is renowned for in holy writ,—James v. 17; Isa. xxxvii. 15;

Digitized by Google

Dan. ii. 20; 2 Sam. xv. 34; Esther iv. 16; Acts xii. 5; John xi. 41; Jonah ii. 2; Josh. x. 12, 14; 2 Kings xx. 11; Psa. cvi. 23; Ezek. xxii. 30. This is the key that hath opened and shut heaven. It hath vanquished mighty armies: and unlocked such secrets as passed the skill of the devil himself to find out. It hath strangled desperate plots in the very womb wherein they were conceived; and made those engines of cruelty, prepared against the saints, recoil upon their inventors, so that they have inherited the gallows which they set up for others. At the knock of prayer, prison doors have opened, the grave hath delivered up its dead, and the sea's leviathan, not able to digest his pray, hath been made to vomit it up again. It hath stopped the sun's chariot in the heavens, yea, made it go back. And that which surpasseth all, it hath taken hold of the Almighty, when on his full march against a people, and put him to a merciful retreat. Indeed, by the power prayer hath with God, it comes to prevail over all the rest. He that hath a key to God's heart cannot be shut out, or stopped at the creature's door. Now prayer moves God and overcomes him, not by causing any change in the Divine will, and making God to take up new thoughts of doing that for his people which he did not before intend. No; God is immutable: and what good he doth in time for his people, he purposed before time was. But prayer is said to do more than overcome God, because he then gives, what from eternity he purposed to give upon their praying to him. For when God decreed what he would do for his saints, he also purposed they should pray for the same: 'I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them,' Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Prayer must be used, in order to obtain the mercies God purposeth and promiseth. Hezekiah understood this when he calls the prophet to the church's labour, and bids, because the children stuck in her birth, that he should therefore lift up a prayer, Isa. xxxvii. 4. And when Daniel had found the full reckoning of the promise, how long it had to go, with the deliverance promised for their return from captivity, perceiving it hastened, he therefore falls hard to prayer, knowing God's purpose to give doth not discharge us from our duty to ask, Dan. ix. 3.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED, WHY GOD REQUIRES PRAYER FOR THAT WHICH HE HATH PROMISED BEFORE TO GIVE?

But why doth God impose this upon the saints, that they should pray for what he hath proposed and promised to give? First, That they may be conformable to Christ. The design of God is to make every saint like Christ: this was resolved from eternity, Rom. viii. 29. Now, as the limner looks on the person whose picture he would take, and draws his lines to answer him with the nearest similitude that he can, so God looks on Christ as the archetype to which he will conform the saint, in suffering, in grace, and glory; yet so that Christ hath the pre-eminence in all. Every saint must suffer, because Christ suffered: Christ must not have a delicate body under a crucified head; yet never any suffered, or could, what he endured. Christ is holy, and therefore so shall every saint be, but in an inferior degree: an image cut in clay cannot be so exact as that engraved on gold. Now, our conformity to Christ appears, that as the promises made to him were performed upon his prayer to his Father, so promises made to his saints are given to them in the same way of prayer: Ask, of me,' saith God to his Son, 'and I shall give thee,' Psa. ii. 8. And the apostle tells us, 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' God hath promised support to Christ in all his conflicts: Isa. xlii. 1, 'Behold my servant, whom I uphold.' Yet he prays, with strong cries and tears,' when his feet stood within the shadow of death. A seed is promised to him, and victory over his enemies; yet for both these he prays. Christ towards us acts as a king; but towards his Father as a priest. All he speaks to God is by prayer and intercession. So the saints; the promise makes them kings over their lusts, conquerors over their enemies; but it makes them priests towards God, by prayer humbly to sue out those great things given in the promise. Secondly, That God may give the good things of the promise with safety to his honour. Secure God but his glory, and the saint may have what he will. The very life of God is bound up in his glory. The creature's honour is not intrinsical to his being. A prince is a man

Digitized by Google

when his crown and kingdom are gone; but God cannot be a God except he be glorious; neither can he be glorious unless he be holy, just, merciful, and faithful, &c. Now, that his glory may be seen and displayed is the great end he propounds, both in making and ordering of the world: Prov. xvi. 4, 'The Lord hath made all things for himself.' If there were any one occurrence in the world which could be no way conducible to the glory of God, it would make his being to be questioned. But the all-wise God hath so made and ordered all his creatures, with their actions, that the manifestation of his glory is the result of all. Indeed, he forceth it from some, and takes it as princes do their taxes from disobedient subjects: thus the very wrath of his enemies shall praise him. Psa. lxxvi. 10. But he expects the saints should be active instruments to glorify him, and, like loyal subjects, pay him the tribute of his praise freely, with acclamations of joy and gratitude; and that they may, he issueth out his mercies in such a way as may best suit their duty, and that is to give the good things he hath purposed and promised to them upon their humble address in prayer to him. Now, two ways the glory of God is secured by this means. First, The saint, in the very duty of prayer, when he performs it in a proper manner, doth highly glorify God. Prayer is a channel of grace, for the conveying and deriving blessings from God into our bosoms: so a means of worship, whereby we are to do our homage to God, and give him the glory of his Deity: by this we give him the glory of his power. Prayer is an humble appeal from our impotency to God's omnipotence. No one begs that at another's door which he hath himself at home; and if we thought not God able, we would go to another. We give him the glory of his sovereignty and dominion, and acknowledge that he is not only able to procure for us what we ask, but can give us a right to, and the blessing of, what he gives: therefore Christ closeth his prayer with, 'Thine is the kingdom, power, and glory,' &c., as a reason why we direct our prayers to God, because he alone is the Sovereign Lord that can invest us in, and give us title to, any enjoyment. So that it is high treason against the crown and dignity of God when we either attempt to possess ourselves of any enjoyment without praying to him, or when we pray religiously to any other besides him. By the first we usurp his sovereignty ourselves: Jer. ii. 31, 'We are lords; we will come no more unto thee.' And by the second we give away his kingdom and sovereignty to another. This was the devil's drift when he would have had Christ fall down and worship him, that thereby he might acknowledge him to have the rule of the world. Again, by prayer we give him the glory of his free mercy. Men demand a debt; but when we pray, we renounce merit. See them opposed, Job ix. 15, 'Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer; but I would make supplication to my Judge.' We might show the same in all the other attributes; but this may suffice. And as God, essentially considered, receives by prayer an acknowledgment of his Deity, so every person in the sacred Trinity,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in prayer, are honoured by directing our prayers to God the Father. We honour him as the source and fountain of all grace and mercy; we honour the Son in presenting our prayers in his name to the Father; and the Holy Ghost receives the honour of that assistance which we acknowledge to receive from him; for as we pray to the Father through the Son, so by the help of the Spirit.

Secondly, As God is honoured in the very act and exercise of this duty, duly qualified, so by it the Christian is deeply engaged, and sweetly disposed to praise God for, and glorify him with, the mercies he obtains by prayer.

First, In prayer we not only beg mercy of God, but vow praise to God, for the mercies we beg. Prayers are called vows: Psa. lxi. 5, 'Thou, O God, hast heard my vows;' that is, my prayers, in which I solemnly vowed praise for the deliverance I begged. It is no prayer where no vow is included.' We must not think to bind God and leave ourselves free. God ties himself in the promise to help us; but the obligation on our part is that we will glorify him; and upon no other terms doth God give us leave to ask any mercy at his hands. 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,' Psa. l. 15. Now, what a strong tie doth this lay upon the praying Christian's heart to use the mercies he receives holily, and to wear with thankfulness what he wins by prayer! The Christian who would be loth to be taken in a lie to man, will much more fear to be found a liar to God: 'Surely they

Digitized by Google

are my people,' saith God, 'children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour.' Isa. lxiii. 8. Secondly, Prayer is a means to dispose the heart to praise. Prayer and praise, like the symbolical qualities in the elements, are soon resolved each into the other. When David begins a psalm with prayer, he commonly ends it with praise. From whence things have their original, thither they return. From the sea the river comes, and no mountains can prevent its return to the sea. That Spirit which leads the soul out of itself to God for supply, will direct it to the same God with his praise. We do not borrow money of one man and return it to another. If God hath been thy strength, surely thou wilt make him thy song. The thief comes not to thank a man for what he steals out of his yard. It is not surprising that they do not glorify God for or with his mercies, who did not ask his leave by prayer for them. What men do by themselves they ascribe to themselves. Mercies ill got are commonly as ill spent, because they are not sanctified to them, and so become fuel to feed their lusts: hence it is, the more enjoyments they have, the more proud and unthankful they are. But by prayer the Christian's enjoyments are sanctified, and the flatulency of them, which puffs up others into pride, is corrected; and the same mercies received by prayer become nourishment to the saint's graces, that putrefy and turn to noisome lust in the prayerless sinner. Thirdly, God will have his people pray for what he hath purposed and promised, to show the delight he takes in their prayers. As a father, though he can send to his son, who lives abroad, the money he hath promised for his maintenance, yet will not let him have it except he comes at the appointed time for it. And why? Not to trouble his son, but to delight himself in his son's company. God takes such delight in the company of his praying saints, that to prevent all strangeness on their part, he orders it so that they cannot neglect a duty but they shall lose something by it. 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And the more they abound in prayer, the more they shall abound in blessings. The oftener Joash smote upon the ground, the more complete was his victory over the Syrians. As the arrows of prayer are that we shoot to heaven, so will the returns of mercy from thence be; yet it must not be imputed to any lothness in God to give, that he makes them pray often and long before the mercy comes, but rather to the delight he takes in our prayers: he doth this to draw out the graces of his Spirit in his children, the voice of which in prayer makes sweet melody in the ear of God. The truth is, we are in this too much like musicians playing under our window; they play until the money is thrown out to them, and then their pipes are put up. And were our wants so supplied by the answer of one prayer, so that we did not suddenly need recruiting, we would be gone, and God would not hear of us in haste.

CHAPTER V.

A SHARP REPROOF TO ALL PRAYERLESS SOULS; WITH THE DISMAL STATE THAT SUCH ARE IN, SHEWN.

A WORD to those who live in the total neglect of this duty. Such there are to be found, who pass their wretched days like so many swine; they never look up to heaven till God lays them on their back; nor are heard to cry in prayer, till his knife is at their throat. What shall I say to these giants, the sons of the earth, that have renounced their allegiance to the God of heaven;—these kine of Bashan, who, like so many metamorphosed Nebuchadnezzars, have lost the heart of a man, and live as the beasts, who, while they feed, take no notice of him that clothes the field with grass for them! Can I hope they will hear man, who will not acknowledge the God of heaven, by praying to him? Surely your case is deplorable. What, not pray! Can you do less than by this homage to own God for your maker? or less for your own souls than to beg their life of God, whose hand is lift up against you? Are you resolved to throw yourselves into the devil's mouth, without striking one stroke for your defence? If God had required a greater matter at your hands than this, the salvation of your souls would have deserved it; and will you hesitate at this? God does not put us to the cost of laying down the price of our ransom; no, not so much as to pay our prison fees; only he bids thee pray, and he will reward thee: 'Their souls shall live that seek the Lord,' Psa. lxix. 32. O what salt and vinegar will

Digitized by Google

this pour into thy wounds, when in hell thy conscience shall fly in thy face, and tell thee thou hadst not been there if thou had in time have humbled thy soul before God, and sought his favour in that way which cost Christ his blood! Either thou must be dispossessed of this dumb devil, or it will be thy damnation. And who dies with less pity than that malefactor, who will not so much as go down on his knees, or open his mouth to cry for mercy, though the Judge on purpose defer the pronouncing of the sentence, and break up the court, to see whether his proud spirit will stoop to ask his life at his hands? You know how angry Pilate was when Christ was silent, John xix. 10: 'Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?' Alas! poor creature, he could do nothing for or against him; and therefore Christ neither feared him, nor owed him so much as to bestow a word upon him. The warrant for Christ's death was sealed in heaven, and he, with the rest of Christ's enraged enemies, were but God's servants to do the execution according to the determinate counsel of God. But how much more reason hath the great God to be provoked by thee, and say, Wilt thou not speak to me,—pray to me? Dost thou not know I have power to save or damn,—to deliver thee to the tormentor, or keep thee out of his hands? Or dost thou suppose that God is bound to save thee, pray or not? If he doth, I promise you he shall do more for thee than for others; yea, than for his own Son, who made strong cries and supplications to be saved by him. God hath laid the method of salvation, and think not that he will make a blot in the counsel of his will for thy pleasure: what he hath written shall not be reversed; yea, though others should be so kind, out of pity, to pray for thee, yet if thou be thyself a prayerless soul, thou shalt die the death. If they were Noah, Samuel, and Daniel, that stood up to beg thy life, they should not be heard for thee. Prayers by proxy in this case will not prevail. When the Israelites came begging to Samuel for his prayers, mark what caveat he annexeth,—'Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,' 1 Sam. xii. 24. As if he had said, Do not set me to do that for you which you will not do for yourselves; it is not all the interest my prayers have in heaven will keep the wrath of God from falling on you, if you be wicked; therefore, 'fear the Lord, and serve him;' that is, pray and obey him. Fear often denotes the worship of God. Gen. xxxi. 42, God is called the 'fear of Isaac;' that is, the God whom he feared and worshipped. So Jer. x. 7: 'Who would not fear thee, O King of nations?' that is, worship thee, because the worshipping of God results from the reverence and fear we have of him. Christ 'was heard in that he feared,' Heb. v. 7; that is, his religious fear was expressed in his strong cries, which he groaned forth to God in his agony; therefore so long as you are prayerless, you live without the fear of God. And what will not such a wretch dare to do? Even anything that Satan shall command him, though it be to go to a wizard. When Saul had given over inquiring after God, we hear him knocking at the devil's door, and asking counsel of a witch. O take heed of living so near the tempter! If Satan might have his wish, surely it would be this, that the creature might live prayerless; for by this he should do the greatest spite possible to God, in that he makes the creature set him at nought in all his attributes, and have the greatest advantage against the sinner. Now he hath thee as sure as the thief hath the traveller, when he hath thrown him into a ditch fast bound, and stopped his mouth, so that he cannot cry for help. In a word, thou art free booty for Satan, to satisfy his lust upon thee. He that prayeth, invites God into his acquaintance, and soon shall have it; as we see in Paul, who had Ananias sent from God to him: but he that lives in the neglect of this duty, gives the devil fuller possession of him. Thou art the man most fit for him to make an atheist of. I should not wonder that the devil persuades thee there is no God, who already livest in such defiance against him, as cannot but make the belief of a Deity dreadful to thy thoughts. Herod was soon persuaded to cut off John's head, because, when alive, he so troubled his conscience; and it is to be feared thou wilt easily be drawn to attempt the stifling all thoughts of a Deity from whom thy conscience expects to hear nothing that can please thee. It is probable thou hast much of the atheist in thee already, or thou dare not deny God that part of natural worship, which they that knew him least gave unto him. I am sure the Scripture lays this boat of irreligion at the door of atheism. The fool would

Digitized by Google

fain persuade himself there is no God; and when he hath got so far the mastery of his conscience as to blot God out of his creed, he then soon leaves him out of his *paternoster*, Psa. xiv. 1.

But some will ask, if I think that any, where the gospel is preached, neglect prayer on this account? I do; and, which is more, I think there are worse atheists to be found under the meridian light of the gospel than in the darkest nook in America. As weeds grow rankest in richest grounds, and fruits ripest in hottest climates, so do sins grow to the greatest height where the gospel sun climbs highest. 'Who is blind, but my servant?—and blind as the Lord's servant,' Isa. xlii. 19. Who are such atheists as those that have their eyes put out by the light of the gospel? The poor Indian's little knowledge of a God is for want of light, which may be cured when it is brought to them; but if a judiciary atheism (as that in gospel times and places commonly is) falls upon a soul so rebelling against the light, this is incurable; here the very visual faculty is perished, and the eye bored out.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS, THAT THEY ABOUND IN THIS DUTY.

CHRISTIAN, be you provoked to ply this oar more diligently: if this be neglected, a universal decay of all your graces follows. When the ports and havens of a kingdom are blocked up, that the merchant cannot go forth, there follows a damp on all the inland trade, so that an enemy needs not strike a stroke, but stand still to see them eat up one another. The psalmist tells us of a stream which makes glad the city of God, Psalm xlvi. 4. The promise is this stream, upon which the saints have all their provisions brought to their doors: if this be kept open, Satan cannot much distress them, which is done when they can send out their prayers on this stream to heaven; but if once this trade be stopped, then they are hard put to it. It is observed of our neighbours in the Netherlands, that whereas other nations are generally made poor by war, they have grown rich by it, because by their wars they enlarge their trade. And if thou wouldst thrive by all thy temptations, thou must take the same course; whatever thou dost, stop not thy trade with heaven. God hath (to make the more diligent in this duty) so ordered things, that all the treasure of the promises is to be conveyed to thee in prayer. This is like the merchant ship, 'it brings thy food from afar.' If thy mercies were of the growth of thy own country, thou mightest spare a voyage to heaven: but, alas! when thy storehouse is full, if no supplies come to thee from heaven, how soon wouldst thou be brought, with the poor widow, to eat thy last cake and die? It was not her little meal in her barrel, nor oil at the bottom of her cruse, but God's blessing multiplying them, that made them hold out so long: so it is not thy present grace, strength, or comfort, but God's feeding these with a new spring, that thou must live upon: cease praying, and the oil of grace will cease running: 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And when the store is spent, the city must yield. As thou wouldst not fall into Satan's hands, keep up a good correspondence with God at the throne of grace. Satan hath received so many overthrows by the saints' prayers, that he trembles at the force of this great ordinance of Heaven. This is the mighty voice of God in his saints, which shakes these mountains of pride, divides the flames of their fiery temptations, and makes them cast forth their abortive counsels to their shame and disappointment: 'O Lord, I pray thee turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness;' 2 Sam. xv. 31. This one prayer made both Ahithophel a fool, and him that set him on also, defeating the wisdom both of man and devil. Satan hath such an impression of dread upon him, from the remembrance of what he hath suffered from prayer, that he will try every way to obstruct thee in it. What do we? said the Pharisees concerning Christ, for this man does many miracles; if we let him alone, the Romans will come, and take away both our place and nation. Satan cannot deny but great wonders have been wrought by prayer. As the spirit of prayer goes up, so his kingdom goes down. It is of the royal seed; he can no more stand before it, than falling Haman before rising Mordecai. And, therefore, seeing this is likely to do thee such great service against him, it behoves thee the more to defend it from

Digitized by Google

his stratagems. Because the great artillery of an army is so useful to it, and formidable to the enemy, it hath a strong guard set about it. Now Satan's stratagems against prayer are three. First, If he can, he will keep thee from prayer. If that be not feasible,—Secondly, He will strive to interrupt thee in prayer. And, Thirdly, If that plot takes not, he will labour to hinder the success of thy prayer.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO STRATAGEMS WHEREBY SATAN LABOURS TO KEEP THE WEAK CHRISTIAN FROM THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

His first design upon thee will be to keep thee from prayer; to effect which, he wants not his stratagems; many objections he will start, and discouragements throw in thy way to this duty, hoping that if thou stumblest not at one, yet he may make thee fall by another. And, which is worst, thou wilt find a party in thy own bosom ready to listen to what he saith, yea, to take up his arguments, and maintain the dispute against thy engaging in this work. We shall pick a few among many, and put an answer into thy mouth against he comes.

Section I.—What, thou pray! if thou dost, thou wilt but play the hypocrite, and thou hadst better not pray at all. Nay, possibly thy own misgiving heart may suggest the same, or at least so far credit his charge, as to make thee waver in thy thoughts, what thou shouldst do, pray or not. Now, to arm thee against this, consider, First, Thou art but afraid thou shouldst play the hypocrite: but thou wilt certainly prove thyself an atheist, if thou dost not; and that is it which he would have. I hope thou art wiser than to neglect a known duty upon a jealousy thou hast of miscarrying in it; to lie down in a known sin, yea, so broad a one as brands him for an atheist that continues in it, for fear of meeting a lion (and may be but a bugbear) in the way of thy obedience to an indispensable command. Secondly, Thou art in less danger of playing the hypocrite, because of thy fear. Some bodily diseases, indeed, are catched with fear. He is most likely to have the plague that fears it most; but none are so safe from sin as they that most fear the falling into it. I desire no better argument to prove thee sincere than thy fear of hypocrisy. If this be the great trouble of thy soul, the devil hath more reason to fear thy sincerity, than thou thy hypocrisy: and this it is that makes him endeavour to dissuade thee from prayer, because thou wouldst scare him so much by thy praying. If thou wert an hypocrite, as he pretends, he would invite and persuade thee to it, rather than thou shouldst not come to the work; and when thou art risen from thy knees, he would thank thee for thy pains, because he knows God would not. The hypocrite does him more service than God. You do not believe, surely, that the devil was any great enemy to Jezebel's fasting; nay, I doubt not but he put it into her head, that she might thereby mock both God and man. Her fast was the devil's feast. Thirdly, If thou findest more cause to fear thy playing the hypocrite, than I do who am a stranger to thy heart; I say, if thou fearest that this is the sin which is most likely to make a breach upon thee in thy duty, do as Moses did, who slew the Egyptian to rescue the Israelite: destroy the sin, that thou mayest rescue thy soul from the neglect of a duty. Thou hast a fair advantage by the intelligence God graciously gives thee whence thy danger is most likely to come, of falling on thy enemy, and taking the fuller revenge on him before thou settest about the work of prayer. If in thy heart thou hate this odious sin, and are fixed in thy resolution against it, with God's blessing, it shall neither be able to hurt thee, nor hinder thy prayer.

Section II.—O! but saith Satan, thou hast no gifts for prayer; leave that for them that can perform this duty after a better fashion. What meanest thou by gifts? If a flowing tongue, which some have, whereby they are able on a sudden, with a long continued discourse, to run over all the heads of prayer in a clear method, and clothe every petition with apt and moving expressions; we will suppose thou hast not the gift; but God forbid that the want of this should keep thee from praying, or make thee go the less comfortably to the duty! The want of these shews only thou hast not so good a head, but doth not the least hinder thy heart to be as gracious as theirs; and better the defect should be

Digitized by Google

found in thy head than in thy heart. Thy invention in prayer by this will be more barren, but thy heart may be as fruitful over the few broken, disjointed sentences that fall from thee, as theirs with their eloquent oration. Thy language will not be so gaudy, but thy soul and spirit may be as sound, yea, more upright than many of those who charm the ears of those that join with them. It is possible a man may have a rotten body under a gaudy suit; and under this fine language, a poor ragged conscience. Who had not rather be sincere with mean gifts, than rotten-hearted with great parts? We do not count him the best patriot that is the best orator, and makes more rhetorical speeches than others, but he that takes the best side. It is not the rhetoric of the tongue, but the hearty Amen, with which the sincere soul seals every holy request, that God values; and this thy honest heart will help thee to do; which his head cannot, that wants this sincerity. It is not the fairness of the hand that gives the force to the bond, but the person whose hand and seal it is. Gifts may make a fair appearance, but faith and sincerity make a valid prayer; and this alone can lay claim to the good things of the promise. In a word, sincere soul, though thou hast not these praying gifts as others, yet thou hast as much interest in Christ, the 'unspeakable gift,' 2 Cor. ix. 15, as any of them all. And, for thy everlasting encouragement know, it is not those gifts in them, but this gift of God to thee, and all believers, which is the key that must open God's heart, if any mercy be got thence: yea, this gift must sanctify their glittering gifts, as the altar did the gold upon it, or they will be an abomination to the Lord.

CHAPTER VIII.

SATAN'S POLICY TO KEEP A SOUL FROM THIS DUTY, UPON A PRETENCE OF PRESENT INDISPOSITION OF BODY.

SATAN, and the flesh too, have their excuses to take off thy duty, when thy stated time comes about for the performance of it. Dost thou never, when addressing thyself to the throne of grace, hear Satan and thy flesh whispering in thine ear,—What art thou going to do? This is not a fit time for thy praying; stay for a more convenient season. Here the devil seems modest: he saith not, pray not at all, but not now; not dissolve, but adjourn the court to a more proper time. Now beware, thy foot is near a snare; if thou takest the devil's counsel, and waitest for his convenient season, may be it will prove like Felix's convenient season for calling Paul to a further hearing, which, for aught we find, never came about. When the flesh or Satan beg time of thee, it is to steal time from thee. They put thee off duty at one time, on a design to shut thee out at last from this duty at any time. The devil is a cunning sophist; he knows a modest beggar may sooner obtain the little he asks, than he that saucily asks that which carries more unreasonableness in the request. Jephtha, who yielded to his daughter's desire for a few months' reprieve, would, it is likely not have heard her, had she begged a full release from her father's vow. A gracious soul is under a vow to call upon God: Satan knows, that, should he at first ask the saint never to pray any more, such a request would not be attended to; therefore he would seem very willing he should sometimes pray: Ay! by all means, saith he, I would not have you turn your back on your best friend, but now is not so fit a season. Two pleas Satan hath to cheat the Christian of his present opportunity for prayer. First, From his present indisposition to pray. Stay, Christian, saith he, till thou art in a better temper for duty, and thou wilt pray to more purpose. Now there is a double indisposition, which Satan and the flesh make use of to colour their pretence with. First, Indisposition of body. Some distemper lies at present on thee; and Scripture, say these, tell thee, God loves mercy rather than sacrifice. And it cannot be denied that the Scripture will reach as far as the body, for God's commands are not cruel to it. But, to help thee out of this snare, tell me, how great is thy distemper of body? Happily thou art not so ill, but thou canst go about thy worldly business, though with some groans and complaints; but when thou shouldst pray, then thy head aches and shoots more than before. Art thou well enough to go into thy shop, but not well enough to pray in thy closet? Canst thou waddle so far as to the market, and not pray at home? Canst thou

Digitized by Google

overcome thy distemper so far as to traffic with the world, but not to trade with heaven? Surely all is not right. May not God say, I deserve thy company as well as the world? But suppose thou art quite laid up, and cannot attend to thy worldly employments; yet will this excuse thee from visiting the throne of grace. God takes thee out of the shop to shew thee thy way into the closet: he knocks thee off thy worldly trade, that thou mayest follow thy heavenly more closely. Thou art not, indeed, able to pray in a continual discourse, as in health; neither doth God expect it. Here that scripture, which the devil would have thee abuse, is suitable to thy present state,—'God loves mercy rather than sacrifice.' Yet now, if ever, is the time for thee to shoot those darts of ejaculatory prayer to God. When our body breathes shortest, it breathes quickest. Though thou canst not pray long, yet thou mayest pray much in these pathetic sallies of thy soul to heaven. The Christian should have his quiver full of these arrows, which, though short, go with force. Christ never prayed more earnestly than in his agony; which prayer was of this nature,—O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,' Matt. xxvi. 39. And after a little pause (that nature might take some breath, by reason of that unspeakable burden which then lay upon it) he shoots the same dart again to heaven thrice, one after another, ver. 44. In a word, though thou canst not pray as thou wert wont, yet thou canst desire others to pray for thee and with thee: we are bid to send for the elders, yea, and beg prayers of others too. So pitiful is God to us, that when, through our own weakness, we are disabled from delivering our own conceptions in prayer, we may have the assistance of others; when we cannot go ourselves, as we were wont, to the work, we may be carried on the shoulders of their prayers, and fly on the wings of their faith to heaven.

CHAPTER IX.

SATAN'S STRATAGEM TO KEEP THE CHRISTIAN FROM PRAYER, UPON PRETENCE OF PRESENT INDISPOSITION OF HEART.

O, BUT thou mayest say, it is not the sickness of thy body, but the deadness of thy heart, and indisposition of thy soul, that keeps thee from duty. Thou wouldst fain have that in a better frame, and then thou wouldst not be long a stranger to it.

SECTION I.—Let me ask thee, Christian, what thou hast found (in the observation of thy own heart) to be the fruit that hath grown from such delays? Hath neglect of duty at one time fitted thee for it at another? I believe not. Sloth is not cured with sleep, nor laziness with idleness. If our leg be numbed, we walk, and so it wears off. Satan knows, if thou playest the truant to-day, thou wilt go the more loth to school to-morrow. Give the flesh a little scope by thus unlacing thyself, and it will endure less to be straitened afterward. There is something to do to bridle a wanton beast, when he hath got the bit once out of its mouth. The spouse's coat sat very easy when on her back, and unwilling, no doubt, she was to be stripped; but when once, by a wile of Satan, she was persuaded to put it off, how loth was she then to get it on again! and therefore, whenever you are turning from any other duty, merely upon this account, consider well what is likely to follow. Thou wilt see thy sin, and return with shame and sorrow for thy neglect. And is it not less trouble to pray now, than upon such terms afterward? A heathen could say, he would not sin to buy repentance; and shouldst not thou have more wisdom to know which is a bad bargain for thy soul? This neglect will beget another, and that a third, and so thou wilt run farther in arrears with thy conscience, till at last, thou givest over all thoughts of renewing thy acquaintance with God, because thou hast discontinued it so long.

SECTION II.—Examine from whence this present indisposition comes, and probably thou wilt find reason to charge it either upon some sinful miscarriage in thy christian course, or on thy neglect of these means through which thou art to pass into the performance of this duty. First, See whether thou hast not been tampering with some sin knowingly. There is an antipathy between sinning and praying, partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming into God's sight, because conscious of a fault. The child that hath misspent the day in play

Digitized by Google

abroad, steals to bed at night, for fear of a chiding from his father. Sin and prayer are such contraries, that it is impossible at one stride to step from one to another. It is an ill time when the fountain is stopped or muddied, to go to draw water. If the workman's tools be blunt, no work can well be done till a new edge is set on them. It is the devil's policy thus to disturb and unfit the Christian for duty, that he may leave it undone. Therefore, be it thy first care to keep the fountain of thy heart clear, remembering that from it those holy affections, which in prayer thou art to pour forth to God, must be drawn. Look thou lendest not any power of thy soul to be Satan's instrument in sin's foul work, lest thou find it out of order when thou art to use it in this spiritual service. A good servant will not have her dishes foul when they should be used, but clean, and ready against they are called for. 'If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the master's use, and prepared for every good work.' Secondly, If thou findest guilt contracted, and, consequently, a fear to come so nigh God, as this duty will bring thee, yea, an estrangement also upon thy heart from this work, thy best way is speedily to sue for pardoning mercy and purging grace. New breaches are made up better than long quarrels: new wounds are healed easier than old sores. Get thee to the throne of grace. Water the earth, if thou canst, with thy tears, and fill heaven with thy sorrowful sighs for thy sin; but by no means shift off thy duty on this pretence; for that is not the way to mend the matter, but make it worse. Jonah did ill to consult his credit rather than the exaltation of God's mercy; and how he should come honourably off with his embassy, than how the name of the great God, his master, that sent him, might be magnified. But he did worse when these sinful thoughts, stirred in him (which he should have humbled himself for), made him run away from his Master's work also.

Thus, Christian, it is ill done of thee to make a breach in thy holy course, by tampering with any sin; but thou wilt commit a greater, if thou turnest thy back on God also in that ordinance where thou shouldst humble thyself for thy former sin. Can one sin be a good argument for committing another? Thou hast fallen into sin in the day, wilt thou not, therefore, pray at night? Surely it were better to beg of God forgiveness of this, and more grace, that thou mayest not do the like to-morrow. Neglect of duty is not the way to help thee out of the pit thou art in, nor keep thee from falling into another. Take heed thou run not further into temptation. Now is the time for the devil to set upon thee, when this weapon is out of thy hand. The best thou canst look for is a storm from God to bring thee back to thy work again; and the sooner it comes, the more merciful he is to thee.

SECTION III.—If, upon faithful inquiry, thou findest not thy heart reproach thee with having indisposed thyself for duty by any known sin in the course of thy life, and yet thy heart continues lumpish and unfit for prayer, then probably thou wilt think thyself tardy in thy actual preparation for the duty. Hast thou solemnly endeavoured by suitable meditations, to blow the coal of thy habitual grace which, though not quenched by any gross sin, yet may be deadened and covered with some ashes by thy being over busy in thy worldly employments? The well is seldom so full that water will at first pumping flow forth; neither is the heart commonly so spiritual, after our best care in our worldly converse (much less when we somewhat overdo therein) as to pour itself into God's bosom freely, without something to raise and elevate it; yea, often, the springs of grace lie so low, that pumping only will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul before the affections rise. Hence are those soliloquies and discourses which we find holy men use with their own hearts to bring them into a gracious temper, suitable for communion with God in ordinances: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me bless his holy name: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,' Psa. ciii. 1, 2. It seems David either found or feared his heart would not be in so good a frame as he desired, consequently he redoubles his charge: he found his heart somewhat drowsy, which made him thus rouse himself. Sometimes calling and exciting the heart will not do, but the heart must be chid: so David was fain to deal with himself at another time; Psalm xlii. 5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted in

Digitized by Google

me?' Heavy birds must take a run before they can get upon the wing. It is harder to get a great bell up, than to ring it when is is raised; and so is it harder work to prepare our hearts for duty, than to perform it when they are in some order. Now, hast thou endeavoured to do this? If not, how canst thou make this pretence to waive the duty because thou art indisposed, when thou hast not used the means to have thy clog taken off? This is as if one should excuse himself for not coming to the feast unto which he was invited, because, forsooth, he was not dressed, when he never went about to make himself ready.

SECTION IV.—Perhaps thou canst answer the former question, and in some uprightness say that thou hast not neglected means, but yet thy deadness of heart remains. Though this case be not so ordinary, yet it is possible that a Christian may walk on those coals of meditation, which at one time would set his soul all on fire, and put his graces into a flame, yet at another he may find little warmth from them. And we will suppose this thy case; therefore consider that God may, and doth sometimes, conceal his enlivening presence till the soul be engaged in the work. And would it not grieve thee to lose such an opportunity? How often hast thou found thyself at the entrance into a duty becalmed, as a ship which at first setting sail hath hardly wind to swell its sails while under the shore and shadow of the trees, but meets a fresh gale of wind when got into the open sea? Yea, didst thou never launch out to duty as the apostles to sea, with the wind in thy face, as if the Spirit of God, instead of helping thee on, meant to drive thee back, and yet hast found Christ walking to thee before the duty was done, and a prosperous voyage made of it at last? Abraham saw not the ram which God had provided for his sacrifice till he was in the mount. In the mount of prayer God is seen, even when the Christian does often go up the hill toward duty with a heavy heart because he can as yet have no sight of him. Turn not therefore back, but go on with courage: he may be nearer than thou thinkest: 'In that same hour,' saith Christ, 'it shall be given unto you,' Matt. x. 19. 'In the day,' said David, 'when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul,' Psa. cxxxviii. 3. It is no more than the promise gives us security for,—'The way of the Lord is strength.' Just as a man, who at first going out on a journey feels feeble in his limbs, but the farther he goes the more strength he gathers; truly the saints find this in God's way: Psa. cxix. 55, 56, 'I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law: this I had, because I kept thy precepts.' His meaning is, by doing his best endeavour, he was enabled to keep them better, and think himself so well paid for his pains, that he glories in it,—'This I had.' So the saint hath this for praying. We may observe those children in Scripture which came of barren wombs were the greatest comfort of their parents when they had them; witness Isaac, Samuel, and John. The greater deadness and barrenness thy heart lies under, and the less hope thou hast to get out of thy indisposition, the more joyful will the quickening presence of God be to thee. The assistance that thus surpriseth thee beyond thy expectation will be a true Isaac, a child of joy and laughter. And a double reason is obvious why God doth thus. First, From the great delight the Lord takes in pure obedience: obedience is better than sacrifice, 1 Sam. xv. 22. To pray in obedience is better than barely to pray. This is the jewel in the ring of prayer. Now, to pray in pure obedience is to set upon the duty where there is no visible assistance or sensible encouragement: to go to duty, not because God puts forth his hand to lead me, but because he holds forth his precept to command me. As when a general commands his army to march, if then the soldiers should stand upon terms, and refuse to go except they have better clothes, their pay in hand, &c., this would not shew them an obedient army; but if at the reading of their orders, they break up their quarters and set out without money in their purse, clothes on their backs, leaving the whole care of themselves for these to their general, these may be said to march in obedience. Thus when a soul, after a faithful use of means, finds his heart dead and dull, yet in obedience to the command, kneels down, though the sense of his inability is so great that he questions whether he shall have power to speak one word to God as he ought, yet had rather be dumb and dutiful than disobedient in running away from his charge. Here is an obedient

Digitized by Google

soul, and may hope to meet God in his way with that which he cannot carry with him; as the lepers, who, when they went in obedience to Christ's command, to shew themselves to the priest, were cured by the way, though they saw nothing of it when they set out.

CHAPTER X.

HOW SATAN'S POLICY TO START SOME WORLDLY BUSINESS TO BE DISPATCHED WHEN THE CHRISTIAN'S HOUR OF PRAYER COMES, MAY BE REPELLED.

ANOTHER method Satan hath to make the Christian put off the duty of prayer as unseasonable, is some worldly business that is to be dispatched; and therefore suggests such thoughts as these:—I have no leisure now to pray; this business is to be done, and that necessary occasion calls for my attendance; I will therefore adjourn till I can come with more freedom and leisure. Now, to arm thee against such pretences, I shall lay down a few directions.

First, Take heed of overcharging thyself with worldly business, which is done when thou graspest more thereof than will consist with thy christian calling. God allows thee to give to the world that which is the world's, but he will not suffer thee to pay the world that which is due to him. Thy particular calling is intended by God to be a help to thy general, it will therefore be thy sin to make that an incumbrance which is given as an advantage; and that which is itself a sin cannot be a plea for the neglect of a duty. The servant would not mend the matter, who excuseth his not doing a business his master commanded, by telling him he had drunk too much when he should have gone about it: nor will thy apology for passing thy time of prayer be better, who sayest thou hadst so much to do in the world that thou couldst not find time to pray. Secondly, Labour to time thy seasons for prayer with discretion in the things of the world: if we have two businesses to dispatch in the same day, we contrive, if possible, that they may not interfere; and certainly a holy providence to forecast how we may reconcile daily the demands of our closet and shop, our devotions and worldly employments, by laying out each its portion of time, would ordinarily prevent much confusion in our walking. The prophet speaks of 'the liberal man's devising liberal things.' We could not easily want time to pray, if our hearts would but persuade our heads to devise and study how our other affairs might be disposed of without prejudice to our devotions. That cloth which a bungler thinks too little for a garment, a good workman can make one of it, and leave some for another use also. O, there is a great deal of art in cutting out time with little loss! Thirdly, Be sure thou keepest a right notion of prayer in thy thoughts. Some look upon every minute of time spent in the closet, as lost in the shop; and no wonder such are easily kept from prayer upon any pretended business, who think it a prejudice to their other affairs. But I hope thou art better taught. Does the husbandman mow the less for whetting his scythe? Doth a good grace before meat spoil the dinner? No: nor doth prayer hinder the Christian either in his employments or enjoyments, but expedites the one, and sanctifies the other. All agree, that to the despatch of business nothing conduceth more, than to begin at the right end of it. And certainly the right end of any business is to begin with God, and engage him to help us. 'Acknowledge God in all thy ways, and lean not to thy own understanding,' &c. Fourthly, The more straits and difficulties thou conquerest, to keep thy communion with God, the more kindly it is taken of God. No friend is more welcome to us, than he who breaks through many occasions to give us a visit. There is little cost, and little love, in an idle man's visit. Mary was Christ's favourite, who trod the world under her feet, that she might sit at his: and the Bethshemites, who, in their zeal, came out of their harvest-field, where they were reaping, to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, 1 Sam. vi. 13—18. Fifthly, Be faithful and impartial in considering the importance and necessity of that business which is propounded as an apology for not performing this duty at thy usual season. It cannot be denied, but such a necessary occasion may fall out, for which the Christian may, without sin, adjourn the solemn performance of his devotions to another more fit time. Who doubts, but a Christian may, when he riseth, go to quench his neighbour's house on fire, though by this he be kept out of his closet, and detained from offering to God that solemn sacrifice of praise and prayer he was wont? Yea, though the

Digitized by Google

occasion be not so extraordinary: if it be, First, About that which is lawful in itself. Secondly, Of importance. Thirdly, Necessarily then to be despatched. And, Fourthly, If it surpriseth us, and we do not bring it upon ourselves by our own fault;—the duty of prayer may, without sin, be adjourned for a fitter time. But let us take heed of stamping a pretended necessity on things and actions, only to gratify our lazy hearts with a handsome excuse, whereby we may both save the pains of performing a duty, and also escape a chiding from our conscience for the non-performance of it. Of all fools, he is the worst who puts a cheat on himself, and especially on his soul: such an one must expect, that the less his conscience barks at present, the more it will bite when it shall be unmuzzled. Again, if the occasion be important and necessary, whereby thou art called off from the solemn performance of this duty at present; then, First, Lift up thy heart in an ejaculatory prayer to God, to guide and guard thee. This is the short dagger thou art to use for thy defence against temptation, when thou hast no time to draw the long sword of solemn prayer. Thus thou mayest pray in any place, company, or employment. A short parenthesis interrupts not the sense of a discourse, but gives elegancy to it: and a short ejaculation to heaven will not interrupt any business thou art about, but benefit it much. Secondly, Be careful to recover this loss which thy worldly business hath put thee to in thy communion with God, by more abounding in thy duty the next opportunity. The tradesman who is kept from his dinner on the market day, goes sooner to his supper, and eats the freer meal at night. O that we were as wise for our souls, what we are prevented at one time, to recover with advantage at another, by a doubled enlargement of our hearts in our prayers and meditations!

CHAPTER XI.

SATAN'S POLICY TO DISCOURAGE THE CHRISTIAN FROM PRAYER, UNDER A PRETENCE, THAT THE MERCIES HE WOULD BEG ARE TOO GREAT FOR HIM TO HOPE HE SHALL EVER RECEIVE.

SATAN discourages sometimes the Christian when on his way to this duty, from the greatness of those requests which he hath to put up to the throne of grace. Thou art going to pray; and will nothing serve thee less than pardon of sin, love and favour of God, with eternal life, &c? Surely thou art too free of another's purse, and too kind to thyself, if thou thinkest to be welcome at God's door with so bold an errand. This is a boon reserved for some few favourites; and darest thou think so well of thyself, that thou art one of them? Now, to arm thee against this, that thou mayest neither be kept from the duty, nor go misgivingly to it upon the account of the greatness of thy request, ponder upon these five considerations.

SECTION I.—Oppose the greatness of that God thou art going to make thy address unto, against the greatness of thy request. We are bid, Duet. xxxii. 3, to ascribe greatness to our God: and if ever, especially when kneeling down to pray. Wert thou to put up thy request to some puny prince, thou hadst reason to consider, whether thy pitcher were not too great that thou wouldst have filled Possibly thou mayest ask such an one more at once than he is worth. 'Help, my lord, O king,' said the woman in the famine of Samaria, yet she had not relief: 'If the Lord do not help, whence shall I help thee?' 2 Kings vi. 26, 27. Or, possibly, if he hath power, he may want a heart to part with so much as will serve thy turn; there are many of Nabal's name in the world; such churls, who think every bit of bread lost that they eat not themselves; yea, some who grudge their own necessary food. Wert thou at the door of such, what couldst thou expect but cold welcome? But remember, he is a great God, great in power: thou canst not over-ask; thou mayest draw thine arrow to the head, and yet not over-shoot the power of God; even when thou hast drawn thy desires to the highest pitch, he will be above thee; 'For he is able to do exceedingly above what we can ask or think.' Wouldst thou have thy sins pardoned? Yes, if they were not too great, thou sayest; but can God at once discount such a sum, and discharge so vast a debt, that hath been gathering many years by a full trade of constant sinning, with so great a stock of means and mercies as I have had? Yes, he is able abundantly to pardon, without any wrong to himself, or

Digitized by Google

control from any other. The sovereign power of life and death being in his hands, he is accountable to none; as not for acts of justice, so neither of mercy. 'It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?' Rom. viii. 33, 34. If indeed, a man forgive thee a wrong done unto him, thou canst not think thyself therefore, acquitted by God: his wrath may still abide on thee. Man cannot give away God's right. Were a man so kind as to forgive the thief that robbed him, yet it is not in his power to discharge him of the penalty of the law; but if the prince, who is the lawgiver, will do it, none can gainsay. If God will pass an act of mercy, thou art free indeed; for the power lies in his hands. Is it any masterly lust, from whose tyranny thou wouldst beg deliverance? The God thou prayest to is able to break open thy prison-door, and make thee, a poor captive, go out free. He can give these, thine enemies, as dust to thy sword, and as driven stubble to thy bow, yea, destroy them with a cast of his eye: the Lord looked on the Egyptians, and troubled their host, Exod. xiv. 24. His very look was as heavy as a millstone about their necks; presently they sank, horse and rider, like lead, to the bottom of the sea. And sin and Satan are no more before God, than were Pharaoh and his host. In a word, is it comfort thou wouldst ask? O, know he is a Creator thou prayest to; though thy heart were as void of comfort as the chaos were of light, yet he can with a word cause a new heaven of joy to arise out of thy confused soul, and make thee in one moment to step out of darkness into light: neither is his mercy less than his power. O, launch, therefore, into this bottomless sea by faith; behold the wonders of God in these depths, and do not stand reasoning thyself into unbelief by any uncomely comparisons between God and the narrow-hearted creature; 'He is God, and not man;' none of these defects are to be found in his mercy, which we, impotent creatures, find in ourselves. The paleness we see sometimes, is not in the sun, but from the clouds that interpose. The stars do not twinkle, as is thought: but we, because of their vast distance, and our weak organ, cannot behold them with a fixed eye: nor have the jealousies and fears entertained by tempted souls, to the disparagement of the mercy of God, any foundation in the Divine nature, but are mere bugbears, which, through the darkness of their troubled spirits, Satan hath the advantage of affrighting them with. O, beware, therefore, thou dost not disfigure the sweet, lovely face of God's mercy, which smiles alike upon every poor, penitent, praying soul, while thou fanciest God to have a partial eye, and to look more favourably upon one than another; lest by this you betray the glorious name of God to be rent in pieces by your cruel unbelief! If you once come to wrap up God in your hard thoughts, as slow to hear, hard to be wrought on with your prayers and tears, truly then Satan may easily persuade you to commit any sin against him, because you expect no mercy from him.

SECTION II.—Oppose the promise to thy fears. There is no mercy thou canst desire, but is promised unto the prayer of faith; the mercy thou wouldst have is already voted in heaven, and the grant past; only God stays for thy coming over to the throne of grace, there to lay thy claim to the promise, before he issueth it forth. The mercy lies in the womb of the promise, but stays for thy prayer of faith to give it a fair deliverance. 'The children are come to the birth,' said Hezekiah: the promise is big, 'wherefore, lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left,' Isa. xxxvii. 3, 4: that is, if anything will help it, it must be that. What can a petitioner desire more in his address to a prince for some great favour, than to be assured not only the prince is of a gracious, merciful nature, but also that he hath obliged himself to give that which he hath in his thoughts to desire? And shall only the promises of God be counted little worth? Have you not heard of such a promise, Ask, that your joy may be full?' Did ever a vain word drop from the lips of truth? Doth he make an order one day, and reverse it another? Are not his words yea and amen, for ever? 2 Cor. i. 20. Beggars used to be quick-sighted. Benhadad's servants saw light at a little hole; and gathered from a few kind words which dropped from Ahab's mouth, that there was mercy raked up in his heart toward their master, which they soon blew up. Joab saw David's bowels working toward Absalom, through the casement of his countenance, and therefore lets down the widow's parable as a bucket to draw out that mercy which lay in his heart, like water in a deep well. How much more encouragement has thou, Christian, to plead with thy God,

Digitized by Google

who art not put to guess at God's thoughts, but hast the assurance of plain promises for thy good speed! O, what fools, and how slow of heart are we to believe the good word of God! If Moses supposed his brethren would have understood, by the kind visit he gave them, and his friendly office in rescuing one single Israelite from his oppressor's hand, that God would by him deliver them all; how much more may God expect that his people should understand his purposes of love toward them, when he exposeth his heart to so open a view of their faith by his promises, and hath sealed the truth thereof with so many examples, to whom already full payment hath been made of the same? And do we yet read them, as the eunuch that sweet promise, Isa. liii., and understand not the meaning of them? Do we yet sit so near our comfort, as Hagar by the well, and our eyes not able to see it? Can we walk over the promises as barren ground, when, with a little digging into them, we might find a treasure to pay all our debts, and supply all our wants?

SECTION III.—Oppose to thy fears, not only the greatness of the promises but also the valuable consideration upon which they are made. Thou, indeed beggest alms; but Christ demands the same as a debt. God is merciful to thee, but just to him: and, therefore, Christian, though it becomes thee to sink thyself beneath the least mercy in thy own thoughts, yet it behoves thee to be tender of Christ's credit, whose merit is as far above the greatest mercy thou canst beg, as thou art beneath the least. The Father will give you little thanks for casting any dishonourable reflection upon his Son, on whom himself hath heaped so much glory; yea, with whose honour his own is so interwoven, that whosoever dishonours the Son, dishonours the Father that sent him. Now there are three privileges purchased for every believer; and none of them can be lost by us without dishonour to him. First, He hath purchased a liberty to pray: it had been death to come on such an errand to God, till he had by his blood paved a way, and procured a safe-conduct, Heb. x. 27. Secondly, An ability to pray; as he purchased the Spirit for us, called, therefore, 'the Spirit of promise.' Thirdly, The safe return of our prayers; 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,' John xvi. 23. Indeed it is his business in heaven to own our cause, and to present his blood for all his saints beg, that no demur be made to their request: so that either thou must blot this article of Christ's intercession out of thy creed, or else put thyself to shame for questioning thy entertainment with God, when thou hast so good a friend at court to speak for thee.

SECTION IV.—The greatness of thy request cannot hinder thy success: they are most welcome that ask most. Who are the persons frowned on at the throne of grace, but those who lay out the strength of their desires, and bestow their greatest importunity, for mercies of least worth! 'They have not cried unto me with their hearts, when they howled on their beds,' Hos. vii. 14. Mark! The Lord did not account that they prayed at all, for all their loud cry; and why, but because he disdained their low spirit, in crying loudest for that which deserve least, as it follows, 'They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and rebel against me;' they would have a good crop, with a full vintage, and these scraps should serve them, so as not to trouble God for any more. God's love and favour are quite left out of the story. May they but have their bellies crammed, they have all their wish, and leave the other for those that like them better. O, how God abhors these carnal prayers, when men tithe mint and cummin, but neglect the weightier things of the promises, such as an interest in Christ, forgiveness of sin, a new heart, grace hear, and glory hereafter: or when they aim at low and base ends in praying for these things, which in themselves are noble and high! And, therefore, fear not the greatness of thy request: God had rather give thee heaven and earth; he can more willingly bestow himself on thee, who art in love with him, than a crust of bread on another that regards him not. The greater the mercy is thou askest, the greater revenue wilt thou pay him for it. The less he gives, the less he receives. By low requests thou wrongest two at once: thou art a thief to thyself in wanting what thou mayest have for asking; neither art thou so good a friend to thy God, as thou shouldest; for the less grace thou hast from him, the less glory thou wilt return unto him. The reflex beams are proportionable to the lightsome body they come from.

Digitized by Google

Where grace is weak, the reflection it makes of praise and glory to God can be but weak.

SECTION V.—God is so free and redundant in communicating his mercy, that he exceeds his people's modesty in asking. He gives them commonly their prayers with an overplus, more than they have faith or face to ask; as Naaman, when Gehazi asked one talent, would needs force two upon him. Abraham asked a child of God, when he wanted an heir in whom he might live when dead: now God promises him a son, and more than so, a numerous offspring: yea, more still, that in his offspring all the 'nations of the earth shall be blessed.' Jacob desired but God's care, under the protection of which he might go and return safely, with food and raiment enough to keep him alive, Gen xxviii. 2. Well, this he shall have; but God thinks it not enough, and therefore sends him home with two bands, who went out with little besides his pilgrim's staff. Solomon prays for wisdom, and God throws in wealth and honour, 2 Chron. i. 10. The woman of Canaan begs a crumb, and Christ gives her a child's portion, she came to have her sick child made well, and with it she had the life of her own soul given her: yea, Christ puts the key of his treasure into her own hand, and leaves her, as it were, to serve herself,—'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. xv. 28.

CHAPTER XII.

SATAN'S ENDEAVOUR TO INTERRUPT IN PRAYER, BY WANDERING THOUGHTS; AND HIS DESIGN BOTH AGAINST GOD AND THE SAINT THEREIN.

THE second design Satan hath against the Christian, is to interrupt him in the duty, when he can by no means keep him from it. It is hard to steal a prayer, and the devil not know what thou art going about. He watches thy motions, and is at thy heels wherever thou goest: if thou art about any evil action, he is at thy elbow to jog thee on, or before thee, to remove every stone out of the way, that the bowl may go the more smoothly on, and thou mayest not be sick of the enterprise by the obstacles thou meetest in the way. Ahab had but a plot hatching in his thoughts of going up to Ramoth-Gilead, and presently Satan hath knights of the post, whom he sends to bid him go up and prosper. David himself had but some proud thoughts stirring him up to number the people,—Satan takes the advantage, and works with the humour now moving, whereby it soon ripened into that sore, which God lanced with so sharp a judgment as the loss of seventy thousand men. Now he is as skilful and ready at hand to disturb a holy action, as to promote a wicked one. When the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, Satan forgets not to be among them; he scruples not to be present when you worship God; indeed, he is first there, and last thence. Sometimes thou shalt find him injecting motions of his own: sometimes wire-drawing thin: when he sees a vain thought, a sin spring by the wanton fancy, he will help thee to pursue the chase. He will always be at one end of every inordinate motion of thy heart; either the father to beget, or the nurse to bring them up. These are so many and diverse, that we may as well count the atoms we see in a sunbeam, as number and sort this miscellaneous heap of roving thoughts which are incident to the Christian in prayer. Sometimes he will inject such as are sinful, proud, filthy, yea, blasphemous; not that he hopes to find entertainment in the Christian's heart for such guests much less to make a settlement of them there with the gracious soul's consent, but to make a confusion in his spirit, whereby, as upon some sudden fright, the holy exercise he is now about may be hindered. Sometimes he with prompt thoughts, holy in themselves, which, at another, he would oppose with all his might, but now most likely to find welcome, and serve his purpose, being, though good fruit, yet brought forth in a bad season. I believe none that have any acquaintance with this duty, and their hearts in it, are altogether strangers to Satan's sleights of this nature.

Now he hath a double plot, one levelled against God, another against the Christian.

SECTION I.—Against God. The devil knows very well, that not the least part of his tribute of honour is by the Christian paid upon his knees in this

Digitized by Google

solemn act of divine worship, to intercept which is both his great ambition and endeavour; nay, he despairs not, if his design takes, to make the Christian dishonour God most, where he expects his name should be above all sanctified. Indeed, those have the unhappy opportunity of casting the greatest indignities on God, who are admitted to stand nearest to him. Should he who hath the honour to set the crown on his prince's head, bring it in a filthy state, and so put it on; or, instead of the king's own royal crown, bring some ridiculous one of straw, &c., what greater scorn could such an one possibly invent to throw upon his prince! The attributes of God are his royal diadem, and it is no small honour that the great God puts upon the Christian, by admitting him, as it were, to set this crown on his head, which he doth, when in prayer he gives him the glory of his majesty and holiness, power and mercy, truth and faithfulness, &c., with such humble adoration, and holy ravishment of affection, as comport with his infinite perfections. But if our thoughts in prayer be not of God, or not suitable to God, and these his glorious excellencies, we pollute his name, and mock him; in a word, we pull off his crown, as much as in us lies, rather than set it on. Now, doth not thy heart tremble in thy bosom, to think thou shouldst be Satan's instrument to offer such an indignity as this unto thy God and King? Thou art, if a saint, the temple of the Holy Ghost, and prayer is the spiritual sacrifice, which, from the altar of a humble heart, thou art to offer; wilt thou now suffer Satan to sit in this temple of God, and exalt himself there by any vain, much less vile, thoughts above God himself, whom thou art worshipping? Suppose, while a prince is at dinner, a company of impudent ruffians should rush into the room, through the negligence of his servants, and they should throw the dishes this way and that way, would not these servants deserve a severe rebuke for not guarding the door? Ordinances of worship are God's table,—the sacrifices under the law are called God's food. When the saint is praying, the King of heaven sits at his table, Cant. i. 12. The dishes served up are the graces of his Spirit in the saint; and now wandering thoughts come in, and turn the table, as it were, upside down; they spill the spikenard which thou shouldst pour forth: how ill may thy God take it, that thou lookest no better to the door of thy heart!

SECTION II.—His spite is at thee, Christian. First, If he can get thee to sport with these, or sluggishly yield to them without making any vigorous resistance, that prayer, he knows, will neither do him hurt nor thee good. Dost thou think God will welcome that prayer to heaven which hath not thy heart to bear it company? And how can thy heart go with it, when thou hast sent it another way? It were a vain thing to expect that ship should make a prosperous voyage, which is set adrift, to be carried whether every wave it meets will drive it, without any pilot to steer it, to a certain haven, or such a one that hath no skill or care to hold the helm with a steady hand: such are the prayers that come from a roving heart. Will God hear thee when thou mockest him? And if this be not to mock him, what is? Like children that give a knock at a door, and then run away to their play again; thus thou raisest thy voice to God, and then art gone in thy roving thoughts to hold converse with the world, or worse? Is not this trifling with God? Thus the holy man complains of himself, how injurious and unworthy of God his carriage was in prayer: I would have God, saith he, hear that prayer which I do not, when I put it up; I would have God's ear attentive to me when I neither mind God nor myself when I pray. Secondly, Satan disturbs thee in praying, that he may make thee weary of praying. Indeed he is not likely to miss his mark, if thou lettest these vermin go on to breed in thy heart; for these will rob thee of the sweetness of the duty; and when the marrow is once out, thou wilt easily be persuaded to throw the bone away. He is in danger to forsake his meat, who hath lost his relish of it. Prayer is a tedious work to him that hath no pleasure in performing of it: and weariness in it stands next door to weariness of it. Thirdly, Thou provokest the Spirit of God (that alone can carry you through the work) to withdraw his assistance. Who will help him that minds not what he does? You know what Joab said to David, when he indulged his inordinate passion for the loss of Absalom,—'If thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night, and that will be worse with thee than all the evil that befell thee,' 2 Sam. xix. 7. Truly, either thou must speedily rouse thyself out of thy

Digitized by Google

sloth, or else the Spirit will be gone,—it will be worse with thee than ever. What hast thou then to help thee in thy work? And thou wilt find it harder to bring him back than to keep him from going. The necessary infirmities which cleave to thy imperfect state (if protested against) shall not drive him away, but if thou lettest them nestle in thy heart, he takes it as thy giving him warning to be gone. An affront done to an ambassador by the baser sort of people, as he walks in the street, while resident in a foreign state, may be passed over; but when such shall find discountenance from the prince, it then makes a breach. Take heed, therefore, of shewing favour to such disturbers of the league between God and thy soul. Thy heart, which should be a house of prayer, Christ will not endure to have it a place of merchandize. Either thou must whip the buyers and sellers out, or the Spirit will go out. We read of an 'abomination of desolation standing in the holy place,' Matt. xxiv. 15, which some interpret to be the Roman ensigns displayed when Jerusalem was taken. This abomination ushered in desolation. What dost thou by thy roving thoughts, but set up an abomination in the temple of thy heart? Oh! down with these, or thou wouldst not be left desolate, and wholly void of God's gracious presence with thee.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONTAINS THE FIRST CAUSE OF ROVING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER.

But you will ask, What counsel can you give to arm us against both the incursions of Satan, and wanderings of our own vain hearts in prayer? Impossible indeed it is, wholly to prevent them, they come so suddenly and secretly, even as lightning in at the window. We may as well keep the wind out of our house (which gets in at every crevice, though the doors be shut), as wholly free our hearts from their disturbance. Yet this will not exempt us from taking the utmost care to hinder the prevalency of them. Humours, while rolling here and there, do not endanger us so much as when they gather to a head, and settle in some part of the body. I have read of some place, where such multitudes of locusts are seen, that they almost darken the air as they fly, and devour every green thing where they alight. The inhabitants, therefore, when they perceive this army hovering over them, by making fires in their fields, keep them from alighting with the smoke. Thou canst not hinder these roving thoughts from flying now and then over thy head, but surely thou mayest do something that may prevent their settling; towards which take these directions, which I shall endeavour to suit to those several causes from whence they proceed.

Section I.—The first cause, and original of all other, is the natural vanity and levity of our minds, which are as inconstant as quicksilver. They are as unstable as water, which element diffuseth itself hither and thither, and soon soon drunk up and lost. Thus do our vain minds scatter themselves, but never so much as when we are conversant about spiritual duties; then, above all, we discover the lightness of our spirits; and this is not the least part of that evil which followed man's degeneracy, who, by his fall, wounded both head and heart. Now, though there be a cure in part made by the grace of God, as to both these in a saint, yet there still remains a weakness in his soul, whereby he is not able to dwell long upon spiritual things without some dissipation of thoughts, as innocent Adam could, who, before his fall, might have walked through the whole world, and not have had one thought of his heart displaced, or turned from its right point by the diversity of objects he met, they being all to the eye of his soul a clear medium, through which it passed to terminate itself in God, as the air is now to our bodily eye, through which it piereeth, and stays not till it comes at the body of the sun. But, alas, it is with us, as with one that hath had his skull broke by some dangerous fall, who, when recovered, finds his brain so weakened, that when he goes about any serious business, he cannot do much, or persist long: such vagaries do our hearts take in duty, and this gives Satan advantage enough to work upon. If the ship be light for want of ballast, and a strong gust of wind arises, O, how hard then is to make it sail trim, or keep it from turning over. A vain heart, and a strong temptation together, make sad work when God stands by, and gives Satan leave to play

Digitized by Google

tise upon it. Be, therefore, careful to take in thy ballast, before thou puttest to sea. Labour to poise thy heart before thou goest to pray; which, that thou mayest do,—

SECTION II.—Inure thyself to holy thoughts in thy ordinary course. The best way to keep vessels from leaking is to let them stand full. A vain heart out of prayer, will be little better in prayer. The more familiar thou makest holy thoughts and savoury discourse to thee in thy constant walking, the more seasoned thou wilt find thy heart for this duty. A scholar, by often thinking of his notions when alone, and talking of them with his colleagues, makes them his own; so that when he is put upon any exercise, they are at hand, and come fresh into his head: whereas another, for want of this attention, wants matter for his thoughts to feed on, which makes him struggle to hit off that which suits his occasion. The carnal liberty which we give our hearts in our ordinary walking, makes our thoughts more unruly and unsuitable for the duties of worship; for such thoughts and words leave a tincture upon the spirit, and so prevent the soul from making a better appearance when it returns into the presence of God. Walk in the company of sinful thoughts all the day, and thou wilt hardly shut the door upon them, when thou goest into thy closet. Thou hast taught them to be bold; they will now plead acquaintance with thee, and crowd in after thee, like little children, who, if you play with them, will cry after you when you would be rid of their company.

SECTION III.—Possess thy heart with a reverential awe of God's majesty and holiness. This will gird up the loins of thy mind, and make thee mind what thou art about. Darest thou trifle with the Divine Majesty in his worship,—carry thyself childishly before the living God, to look with one eye upon him, and with the other upon a lust,—to speak one word to God, and two with the world? Does not thy heart tremble at this? *Sic ora*, saith Bernard, *quasi assumptus et præsentatus ante faciem ejus in excelso throno, ubi millia millium ministrant ei*;—So pray, as if thou wert taken up and presented before God, sitting on his royal throne on high, with millions of millions of his glorious servants ministering unto him in heaven. Certainly, the face of such a court would awe thee. If thou wert but at the bar before a judge, and hadst a glass of a quarter of an hour's length turned up, being all the time thou hadst allowed thee to improve for the begging of thy life, now forfeited and condemned, wouldst thou spare any of this little time to gaze about the court, to see what clothes this man hath on, and what lace another wears? God shame us for our folly in mispending our praying seasons. Is it not thy life thou art begging at God's hands; and that a better, I trow, than the malefactor sues for of his mortal judge? and dost thou know whether thou shalt have so long as a quarter of an hour allowed thee when thou art kneeling down? And yet wilt thou scribble and dash it out to no purpose upon impertinences? If thou believest not God to be so great and glorious, why dost thou pray? If thou dost, why no better? Why art thou not more close and compact in thy thoughts? Will God judge us for every idle word that is spoken in our house and work; and shall thy idle words in prayer not be accounted for? And are not those words idle that come from a lazy, sleepy heart, that minds not what it says? What procured Nadab and Abihu so sudden and strange a death? Was it not their strange incense? And is not this strange praying, when thy mind is a stranger to what thy lips utter? Behave thyself thus to thy prince, if thou darest. Let thy hand reach a petition to him, and thine eye look, or thy tongue talk to another, would he not command this madman to be taken from before him? 'Have I need of madmen that you brought this fellow into my presence?' said Achish, when David himself behaved discomposedly, 1 Sam. xxi. 15. O, could you but look through the veil, and see how glorious angels in heaven serve their Maker, who are said to behold the face of God continually, surely you would tremble to think of slightly performing this duty. Thirdly, Go not in thy own strength to this duty, but commit thyself, by faith, to the conduct of the Spirit of God. God hath promised to prepare, or establish, (as the word is,) the heart. Indeed, then the heart is prepared, when established and fixed. A shaking hand could as soon write straight, as our loose hearts keep themselves steady in duty. Shouldst thou, with Job, make a covenant with thine eye, and resolve to shut up thine ear from all

Digitized by Google

by-discourse, how long wouldst thou be true to thyself, who hast so little command of thine own thoughts? Thy best way were to put thyself out of thine own hands, and lay thy weight on Him that is able to bear thee better than thy own legs. Pray, with David, 'Uphold me, Lord, with thy free Spirit,' Psa. li. 12. The vine, leaning on a wall, preserves itself and its fruit, whose own weight else would soon lay it in the dirt.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONTAINS THE SECOND CAUSE OF WANDERING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER.

A SECOND cause of these wandering thoughts in prayer, is a dead and inactive heart. If the affections be once down, then the Christian is as a city whose wall is broken; there is no keeping then the thoughts in, or Satan out. The soul is an active creature; either it must be employed by us, or it will employ us. Like our poor, find them work, and they will keep at home; but let them want it, and you will see them roving and begging all over the country. The affections are as the master-workman, which set our thoughts on work. Love entertains the soul with pleasant and delightful thoughts on its beloved object: grief commands the soul to muse with sorrowful thoughts on its trouble: so that, Christian, as long as thy heart bleeds in the sense of sin, they will have no leisure, when thou art confessing sin, to wander; if thy desires be lively, and flame forth in thy petitions with a holy zeal for the graces and mercies prayed for, this will be as a wall of fire to keep thy thoughts at home. The lazy prayer is the roving prayer. When Israel talked of travelling three days' journey in the wilderness, Pharaoh said, 'Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore, ye say, Let us go.' As if he had said, Surely they have little to do, or else they would not think of gadding; and therefore, to cure them of this, he commanded more work to be given, Exod. iii. 17, 18. We may truly say thus of our wandering hearts, they are idle: we pray, but our affections are dead and dull. The heart hath little to do in the duty, only to speak or read a few words, which is so easy that a man may do it, and spare whole troops of his thoughts to be employed elsewhere at the same time. But now, when the affections are up, melting into sorrow, in the confession of sin, sallying forth with holy panting and breathing in its supplications, truly this fixeth the thoughts. The soul can no more be in two places together, than the body. And as these holy affections will prevent the soul's wandering, so also make it more difficult for Satan to throw in his injections. Flies will not so readily light on a pot seething hot on the fire, as when it stands cold in the window. Beelzebub is one of the devil's names; that is, the god of a fly: in allusion to the idolatrous sacrifices where flies were so busy. This fly will not so readily light on thy sacrifice when flaming from the altar of thy heart with zeal. Now, to preserve thy affections in prayer warm and lively, let it be thy care to stir up the natural heat that is undoubtedly in thee, if a Christian, by the serious consideration of thy sins, wants, and mercies. While thou art pondering on these, thine eye will affect thine heart: they will, as Abishag did to David, by laying them in thy bosom, bring thy soul to a kindly heat in those affections which thou art to exercise in the several parts of prayer. Thy sins reviewed, and heightened with their aggravations, will make the springs of godly sorrow to rise in thy heart. Canst thou do otherwise than mourn, when thou shalt read the several indictments to thy guilty soul, now called to hold up its hand at the bar of thy conscience? Canst thou hear how the holy law of God hath been violated, his Spirit grieved, and his Son murdered by thy bloody hands, and this when he hath been treating thee mercifully, and not mourn? Surely, should a man walk over a field after a bloody battle, and there see the bodies, though of his enemies, lying weltering in their blood, his heart could not but then relent, though in the heat of battle his fury shut out all thoughts of pity: but what if he should espy a father or a dear friend dead of the wounds which his unnatural hand had given,—would not his bowels turn? Yes, surely, if he carried the heart of a man in his bosom. Thou mayest guess, Christian, by this, what help such a meditation would afford toward the breaking of thy heart for thy sins: certainly, it would make thee throw away that unhappy dagger which was the instrument to give those deep stabs to the heart of Christ, and this is the best mourning of all. Again, thy wants, well weighed,

Digitized by Google

would give wings to thy desires, if once thou wert possessed with the true state of thy affairs, how necessary it is for thee to have supplies from heaven, or to starve and die; and so in the rest.

CHAPTER XV.

CONTAINS A THIRD CAUSE OF WANDERING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER.

A THIRD cause of roving thoughts is an incumbrance of worldly cares. It is no wonder that man can enjoy no privacy with God in a duty, who hath so many from the world knocking at his door to speak with him, when he is speaking to God. Religion never goes in more danger than when in a crowd of worldly business. If such a one prays, it is not long before something comes in his head to take him off. 'Isaac went out to meditate, and behold the camels.' The world is soon in such a one's sight; he puts forth one hand to heaven in a spiritual thought, but soon pulls it back, and a worldly one steps before it, and so makes a breach upon his duty. 'Dreams,' Solomon tells us, 'come from a multitude of business,' and so do dreaming prayers: they are made up of heterogeneal, independent thoughts. The shop and barn are unfit places for prayer; I mean the shop and barn in the heart. I have read of one who was said to be a walking library, because he left not his learning with his books in his study, but carried them about him, wherever he went, in his memory and judgment, that had digested all he read, and so made them his own. And have we not too many walking shops and barns, who carry them to bed and board, church and closet? And how can such pray with a united heart, who have so many sharers in their thoughts? O, holy soul! get thee alone, if thou wouldst have Christ give thee his love. Knowest thou not thou hast a modest husband? Indeed, he gives the soul not his embraces in a crowd, nor the kisses of his lips in the market. Jacob sends away his company to the other side of the river, and then God gave him one of the sweetest meetings he had in all his life: let him now pray even a whole night, if he will, and welcome. Now, Christian, for thy help against these,—

SECTION I.—Labour to keep thy distance to the world, and that sovereignty which God hath given thee over it in its profits and pleasures, or whatever else may prove a snare to thee. While the father and master know their place, and keep their distance, so long children and servants will keep theirs by being dutiful and officious; but when they forget this, the father grows fond of the one, and the master too familiar with the other, then they begin to lose their authority, and the others to grow saucy and under no command: bid them go, and it may be they will not stir; set them a task, and they will bid you do it yourself. Truly thus it fares with the Christian: all the creatures are his servants, and so long as he keeps his heart at a holy distance from them, and maintains his lordship over them, not laying them in his bosom which God hath put under his feet, Psa. viii., all is well; he marches to the duties of God's worship in a goodly order. He can be private with God, and these not be bold to crowd in to disturb him. But when we grow too fond of them, alas! how are we pestered with them! We read of no undutifulness of Hagar toward her mistress while a servant; but when Sarah gives her into Abraham's bosom, and admits her to share with herself in conjugal privileges, truly then she begins to jostle with her mistress, and carries herself saucily to her; yea, and Abraham himself, who would not have hesitated to put her away before, yet now he hath taken her into his bed, can hardly persuade his heart to yield to it, till God joins with Sarah in the business, bidding him hearken unto his wife. Thus, Christian, use the world as a servant, which it was made for, and you may go to prayer, as Abraham up the mount, leaving his servants below; thou shalt find they will not have that power to disturb thee; but let either the profits or pleasures share with Christ in thy conjugal affection, and thou wilt find thy heart loth to send this Hagar away, though at the request of Christ himself. Either use the world as if thou usedst it not, or you will pray as if you prayed not. If thy heart be to the world, thou canst not keep thy thoughts from driving thither: then, and not till then, will thy prayer ascend like a pillar of incense, when there is a holy calmness on thy spirit, and this boisterous wind of inordinate affections to the world be laid. I must not take thee off from diligence in thy worldly

Digitized by Google

calling; this never spoils prayer; only watch thy heart that thou prostitute it not to the wanton embraces of it. That is the pure metal which bends this way and that way, but returns to its straightness again. That heart hath heaven's stamp upon it which can stoop and bend to the lowest action of his worldly calling, but then returns to his fitness for communion with God.

SECTION II.—Strengthen then thy faith on the providence of God for the things of this life. A distrustful heart is ever thoughtful: whatever he is doing, his thoughts will be on that which he fears he shall lose. When the merchant's adventure is insured (that whatever comes he cannot lose much), his heart then is at rest; he can eat his bread with quietness, and sleep without dreaming of shipwrecks and pirates; while another, whose estate is at sea, and fears what will become of it, O how is this poor man haunted wherever he is going, whatever he is doing, with disquieting thoughts If he hears the wind but a little loud, he cannot sleep for fear for his ship at sea. Truly, thus a soul by faith rolled on the promise, will find a happy deliverance from that disturbance which another is pestered with in prayer; wherefore God in particular directs us to lay this burden from our shoulders on his, when we go to pray, that no by-thoughts, arising from these cares, may disturb us. 'Be careful for nothing, but let your requests be made known to God,' Phil. iv. 6. As if he had said, Leave me to take care for your work, and mind you to do mine; if things go amiss in your estates, names, families, I will take the blame, and give you leave to say God was not careful enough of you. When the males of Israel went to worship God at Jerusalem, that they might not carry distracted minds with them, for the fear of their families left behind, without a man to fight for them if an enemy should come, God takes the special care of their families in their absence, Exod. xxxiv. 24. If we have a faithful servant, who we believe will look to our business as carefully as ourselves, this makes us go forth with a quiet spirit, and not trouble ourselves with what is done at home. O, then, let us be ashamed if our faith on God's providence be not much more able to ease us of the burden of distracting cares!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAST CAUSE OF WANDERING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER, AND ITS REMEDY.

THESE wandering thoughts are occasioned by the Christian's non-observance of his heart in the act of prayer. Let him be at never so much pains before duty, yet if he doth not watch narrowly in the duty itself, his heart will leave it, and run into a thousand vanities. The mind of man is a nimble creature: one moment in heaven, and the next on the earth: like Philip, who being joined to the eunuch's chariot, on a sudden was carried out of his sight, and found at Azotus, a place far distant. Thus our hearts are soon gone away from the duty, and taken a journey to the farthest part of the world in their wild imagination; yea, which is worse, sometimes the mind is off and gadding, but the Christian goes on with his lip labour, and takes no notice that his thoughts are gone astray; as Joseph and Mary were gone a day's journey before they missed their child. Thus the Christian loses his heart in duty, and goes on with a careless formality, that sometimes the prayer is almost done before he observes his spirit hath not borne him company all the way; who, had he, at the first stepping aside of his thoughts, been aware, might have recovered and rescued them out of the hands of those vanities which stole them, as David did his wives and children from the Amalekites, without any great trouble or loss. Therefore keep thy heart with all diligence, observe whether it doth its part in the duty. As you do with your children, so you had need with your mind: haply they wait on you to church, but if not awed by your eye, they are gone, and play all the sermon time; to prevent which, you set them before you, that you may see their behaviour. If thou didst thus pray, observing and watching thy thoughts, thou wouldst find more composure in thy spirit than thou dost: nay, do not only observe thy thoughts in duty, but call them to a review after duty. Many go from prayer like boys from school, who think no more of their lesson till they return: they leave praying and all thoughts how they have behaved themselves in prayer together. If thou neglectest to take an account of thyself, consider that thou must give an account of thy neglect to God himself, who will have the

Digitized by Google

full hearing thereof. He sets not any about a work of which he means not to take cognizance how it was done; and were it not better that the audit should be in thy more private court, than thou to give up thy account at his dreadful tribunal? Resolve, therefore, to commune with thy heart upon this point; and the sooner thou goest about it the better it is likely to be done, because then the circumstances of the action will be fresh in thy memory. Go not then out of thy closet till thou hast examined thy heart: if thy thoughts in prayer shall be found to have been in any measure entire, thy affections warm and lively, matter of joy will arise to thee, and thanksgiving to God that thou hast escaped the hands of so many freebooters that lay in wait for thee. But take heed thou applaud not thyself for thine own care and circumspection; alas! thou wert not thine own keeper; he that lent his ear to thy prayer, gave thee thy heart to pray, and also kept it in duty. Say rather, with David, 'What am I, that I should be able to offer so willingly? If thy heart has played the truant, take shame, that thou be not put to shame before the Lord. Oh, blush to think thou shouldst be so unfaithful to God and thine own soul; yea, so foolish as to run up and down on every idle errand which Satan sends thee, and neglect thy own work, of so great an importance. The spouse's complaint may fit thy mouth,—'They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own I have not kept.' He is unwise who, being sent to market to provide food, is drawn by every idle companion to spend both time and money in vain, and comes home without bread for the hungry family. O Christian, was not thy errand to the throne of grace, to get new supplies from heaven for thy poor soul? And doth it not grieve thee to think that now thy soul must pinch for thy playing away thy praying time and talent; yea, that thou hast been injurious to God by taking his name in vain? Thy hand and voice were lifted up to heaven, as if thou meant to pray; but, like him who said he would go into the vineyard, and did not, thou hast turned a contrary way, and set thy thoughts to work in another field; will not this afflict thy heart? And this affliction of thy spirit will be a sovereign means to excite thy care for the future. The faults which are unobserved are also uncorrected in the scholar's exercise, and so not likely to be mended in the next. Wandering thoughts in prayer are like vagrants, the best way to rid the country of the one, and the heart of the other, is to give both the law,—the lash, I mean.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME CONSOLATORY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN DEJECTED OVERMUCH FOR WANDERING THOUGHTS IN PRAYER.

THE affliction of thy spirit for them speaks more comfort to thee than their presence discomfort to thee. That thou art annoyed with such troublesome guests is no more than the best of saints have found. Wherefore did David pray that God would unite his heart to fear his name, but that he found it gadding? What means Paul by his complaint, 'When I would do good, evil is present with me,' but that he had not yet got the full mastery of his unruly thoughts? Thou seest it is no new disease thou art troubled with, but such as is common not only to the sons of men, but the children of God; but their being afflicted by them speaks one of these two things, and both of them have comfort in their mouth for thee; it proves either that they are Satan's injections, and not the birth of thine own heart; or, if they proceed from thine own heart, yet the Spirit of God is the indweller, and these are but intruders. First, The moan thou makest for being yoked to such company is a sign they are rather sent in by Satan than called in by thee; his injections, rather than the suggestions of thine own heart. Our own thoughts commonly are more pleasurable to us. The mother does not more love the fruit of her own body than we the produce of our minds. Hence our own ways, words, and thoughts are called our pleasure, Isa. lviii. 13. And therefore, possibly, they may be shot from Satan's bow, thy heart being so affrighted at them and wounded for them. Or, if they prove the offspring of thine own mind, yet thy afflicted soul shews that the Spirit and grace of God is the indweller, and these but intruders and involuntary motions, such as in thy deliberate thoughts thou abhorrest. Were they of thy

Digitized by Google

own house and family, thou wouldst not shew this zeal to shut the door upon them, or shriek out when they come in upon thee. The wife does not cry out when her husband or children come into the room, but thieves, from whom she looks for nothing but cruelty. It seems they are neither of thine acquaintance, nor art thou fond of their company. Be not, therefore, over-troubled, for Satan, if he can but disquiet thy mind with false fears, hath one part of his errand done for which he sends them: these wicked thoughts are upon no other terms with thee than holy thoughts are in the wicked; as those profit not them, because not entertained, so, for the same reason, they shall not hurt thee. Secondly, Know these are the necessary infirmities of thy imperfect state; and so long as thou art faithful to resist and mourn for them, they rather move God's pity to thee than wrath against thee. It is one thing for a child employed by his father willingly or negligently to spoil the work he sets him about, and another when through natural weakness he fails in the exact doing of it. Should a master bid his servant give him a cup of wine, and he willingly threw both cup and wine on the ground, he might expect his master's just displeasure; but if through some unsteadiness he should, notwithstanding all his care, spill some of it in the bringing, an ingenuous master will rather pity him for the accident than be angry for the wine that is lost. And did God ever give his servants occasion to think him a hard master? Hath he not promised that he will spare us as a father his child that serves him? From whence come all the apologies which he makes for his people's failings, if not from his merciful heart, interpreting them to proceed rather from their want of skill than will or desire? 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Zech. iii. 2: it is Christ's answer in the behalf of Joshua, whom Satan accuseth for his filthy garments. 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' Matt. xxvi. 41, was his favourable glass for his disciples' drowsiness in prayer. Thirdly, Believers' prayers pass a refining before they come into God's hands. Did he indeed read them with their impertinences, and take our blotted copy out of our hand, we could not fear too much; but they come under the Corrector's hand; our Lord Jesus hath the inspection of them, who sets right all our broken requests and misplaced petitions; he washes out our blots with his blood; through his mediation all that is coarse and heterogeneous in our prayers is separated from the pure; what is of his own Spirit's breathing he presents, and what our fleshly part added he hides so that it shall not prejudice us or our prayers. This was the sweet gospel truth wrapped up in the priest's bearing the sins of their holy offerings, Exod. xxviii. 36. Fourthly, Though the presence of these be a great affliction to thee, yet God will make them of singular use. 1. To humble thee, and take all glorying from thee, that thou shalt not pride thyself in thy other assistances, which thou wouldst be prone to do if thy prayer had not this lame foot to humble thee. 2. To keep thee wakeful and circumspect in thy Christian course. By thy disturbance from these thou seest the war is not yet quite done; the Canaanite is yet in the land; though not master of the field, yet skulking in his holes, out of which he comes like an adder in the path, that by these sudden surprises and nibbling at thy heel he may make thee fall backward, and so steal a victory unawares of thee whom he despairs to overcome in a pitched battle by sins more deliberate. And, truly, if he dare be so bold as to set upon thee when in communion with God, so nigh thy rock and castle, doth it not behove thee to look about, that he gets no greater advantage of thee when thou art at a farther distance from him in thy worldly employments? 3. God will make thee by these more merciful to, and less censorious of, thy brethren in greater failings. Fifthly, In thy faithful conflict with them, thou mayest promise thyself, at last, victory over them; but expect this not to be done at once, nor hastily delivered into thy hands; as God said of Israel's enemies. Therefore, maintain the fight; faint not at their stubborn resistance: pray, and mourn that thou canst pray no better; mourn and fight again; fight and believe them down, though sometimes they get thee under their feet. God made a promise to Noah after the flood, in which he gave him a sovereignty over the creatures; 'The fear of you, and the dread of you, shall be upon every beast of the earth,' Gen. ix. 2. But we see many beasts are fierce, savage, and cruel to mankind; yet thus it is fulfilled, none are so fierce and unruly, but by man's art and industry they have been, and still are, taken and tamed, as the apostle hath it, James iii. 7. Thus God

Digitized by Google

hath given his saints, by promise, a sovereignty over sin and Satan; he will subdue both under your feet. The dread of the saint shall fall on the proudest devil, and his foot shall be set on the neck of his fiercest lust, yet this will cost hot work before the one or other be effected.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SATAN'S LAST DESIGN UPON THE SAINT'S PRAYER; AND FIRST IMPEDIMENT THAT MAY OBSTRUCT THE ACCEPTATION OF IT IN HEAVEN.

THE last design that Satan hath against the saint in this great undertaking of prayer, is to hinder his success therein. He will have thee, if he can, one way or other; and it comes all to one, whether the ship be taken as it goes forth, or as it returns home; nay, of the two, it is the greater loss to be defeated of our expectations, when we look for our prayers to come richly fraught with mercies from heaven.

Now, two ways he labours to hinder the success of prayer. First, He endeavours to hinder the welcome of their prayers with God, that they may be cast as a petition out of court, which God will not look on. Secondly, If he cannot prevail on this, then he plays an after-game, and will so handle the matter, if possible, that though they have welcome with God, and find gracious reception in heaven, yet, that this be not believed by the saint on earth, but he gives them up for lost, and looks no more after them. Now, though this be not a total miscarriage of prayer, yet the devil hath hereby a great advantage, depriving him of the present comfort and benefit which his faith might afford him before a return is made of it.

SECTION I.—Satan labours to hinder the entertainment of our prayers in heaven. Now, our prayers may, several ways, be stopped at heaven's door, and denied the gracious access which God useth to give. I speak now of saints' prayers; as for the prayers of the wicked, there is one law for them all, to be cast out, and the door shut upon them. The tree must be good before the fruit it bears can taste sweet on God's palate. Now, the stoppage which the saint's prayer meets with, springs not from any unwillingness in God to give out his mercy, or any dislike to have beggars at his door. God is so delighted with acts of mercy, that, therefore, he made the world, and all in it, that he might have suitors to beg, and alms to give to them: but we put the stones into the lock, which hinders the turning of prayer's key in it, and so we shut the door of mercy upon ourselves. The devil himself could not immediately hinder a saint's welcome (he hath not such command of God's ear), did we not put words into his mouth, and help him to a charge against us. The lies which he, as a false accuser, carries to God, shall not prejudice us in God's thoughts, or make our prayers the less acceptable; but if the accusation be true, God will hear it, though he be a wicked spirit that tells the tale, and we his dear children of whom it is told. A father, when he hears of some wicked prank his child hath played, will chide and frown on him, though it be an enemy that told him of it.

SECTION II.—When the thing prayed for is not according to the will of God. We have not a liberty to pray at random for what we will. The throne of grace is not set up that we may come there and vent our distempered passions before God, or to make any motion to him that comes in our head; truly, then, God should have work enough. If he had promised to sign all our petitions, without any regard to the subject-matter of them, he would too often set his hand against himself, and pass that which would be little for his glory to give. Herod was too lavish, when he give his minion leave to ask what she would, even to half of his kingdom, and he paid dear for it, for he gave her that head which was more worth than his whole kingdom; for the cutting off that, lost him his crown. No, we have to do with a wise God, who, to stop the mouth of all such bold beggars, that would ask what unbecomes us to desire, or him to give, hath given a law of prayer, and confined us to the matter thereof,—'When ye pray, say, Our Father,' &c.; that is, learn here what you may pray for in faith, so that you may receive it: 1 John v. 14, 'This is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' Faith without a promise, is like a foot without firm ground to stand upon.

Digitized by Google

Now, the promise contains this will of God. Be sure thou gatherest all thy flowers of prayer out of this garden, and thou canst not do amiss; but take heed of mingling with them any wild gourd of thy own. Remember the check our Lord gave his disciples when they were giving vent to their vindictive passion in their prayer: 'Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven to consume them?' and he said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' Luke ix. 54, 55. They had here an example to countenance their act, but that *heroicus impetus*, that extraordinary spirit, by which Elijah and other of the prophets were actuated, is not our standing rule for prayer; that came in them from the Spirit of God, which in us may proceed from the spirit of the devil, which is implied in our Saviour's question,—'You know not what manner of spirit ye are of:' as if he had said,—You little think who stirred you up: you had your coal not from God's altar, but from Satan's furnace. Oh, let us beware that we be not the devil's messengers, in going to God upon his errand: which we do, when we pray against the rule, or without a warrant. Belch not out thy unruly passions of anger there, to have thine enemies confounded (the disciples' case), nor vent thy intemperate sorrow through impatience, as Job in the paroxysm of his trouble begs of God to take away his life in all haste. Take counsel of the word, and 'let not thy lip be hasty to utter a matter before the Lord.' Daniel's method was right, chap. ix. 2. First, He goes to the Scripture, and searches what the mind of God was concerning the time when he had promised his people a return out of captivity, which having found, and learned thereby how to lay his plea, away he goes to besiege the throne of grace, ver. 3: 'And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer,' &c. Art thou sick or poor,—in want of any temporal mercy? Go, and inquire upon what terms these are promised, that thy faith may not go beyond the foundation of the promise by a peremptory and absolute desire of them, for then thy building will fall, and thou be put to shame, because thou askest more than God promises.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECOND THING THAT MAY HINDER THE WELCOME AND ACCEPTATION OF A SAINT'S PRAYER.

Though the subject-matter of a saint's prayer be founded on the word, yet if the end he aims at be not levelled right, this is a second door at which his prayer will be stopped, though it pass the former: 'Ye ask, and receive not, because he ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts.' Take, I confess, a Christian in his right temper, and he aims at the glory of God; yet, as a needle that is touched with a loadstone may be removed from its point to which nature hath espoused it, though trembling till it again recovers it; so a gracious soul may in a particular act and request vary from this end, being jogged by Satan, yea, disturbed by an enemy nearer home,—his own unmortified corruption. Do you not think it possible for a saint, in distress of body and spirit, to pray for health in the one, and comfort in the other, with too selfish a respect to his own ease and quiet? Yes, surely; and to pray for gifts and assistance in some eminent service, with an eye to his own credit and applause, to pray for a child with too inordinate a desire that the honour of his house may be built up in him. And this may be understood as the sense, in part, of that expression, Psa. lxvi. 18: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' For though to desire our own health, peace, and reputation, be not an iniquity, when contained within the limits that God hath set, yet, when they overflow to such a height, as to overtop the glory of God, yea, to stand but in a level with it, they are a great abomination. That which in the first or second degree is wholesome food, would be rank poison in the fourth or fifth; therefore, Christian, catechize thyself, before thou prayest: O, my soul, what sends thee on this errand? Know but thy own mind what thou prayest for, and thou mayest soon know God's mind how thou shalt speed. Secure God his glory, and thou mayest carry away the mercy with thee. Had Adonijah asked Abishag out of love to her person, and not rather out of love to the crown, it is likely Solomon would not have denied the bans between them; but this wise prince observed his drift to make her but a step to his getting into the throne, which he ambitiously

Digitized by Google

thirsted for, and therefore his request was denied with so much disdain. Look that when thy petition is loyal, there be not treason in thy end and aim; if there be, he will find it out. When shall I know that I aim at God or self in prayer? This will commonly appear by the posture of our heart, when God delays or denies the thing we pray for. A soul that can acquiesce, and patiently bear a delay or denial (I speak now of such mercies as are of an inferior nature, not necessary to salvation, and so not absolutely promised), gives a hopeful testimony, that the glory of God weighs more in his thoughts, than his own private interest. A selfish heart is both peremptory and hasty; it must have the thing it cries for, and that quickly, or else it falls down in a swoon, or breaks out into murmuring complaints, not sparing to fall foul on the promises and attributes of God himself. 'Wherefore have we fasted,' say they, 'and thou seest not?' Isa. lviii. 3. Now from whence come both these, but from an over-valuing of ourselves, which makes our desires clash with God's glory, that may be more advanced by these delays and denials, than if we had the thing we so earnestly desire? God was more glorified in denying Christ himself his life, than if he had let that bitter cup pass without his tasting of it, which Christ understanding fully, resigned himself thereunto, saying,—'Father, glorify thyself; not my will, but thy will be done.' As if he had said, I would not save my life, to lose thee the least of thy glory. Indeed, this is the copy we should all write after. Our distempered hearts are so hasty, as not to be content with what it hath pleased God to provide for us. The gratification of our vain desires would be no proof of his love toward us; for thereby he would but nourish our distemper, which is better cured by starving than by feeding it.

CHAPTER XX.

CONTAINS THE THIRD AND FOURTH BLOCK THAT MAY LIE IN THE WAY OF A SAINT'S PRAYER.

THE Christian's prayer may miscarry, when with his prayer, he joins not a diligent use of the means. We must not think to lie upon God, as some lazy people do on their rich kindred, to be always begging of him, but not put forth our hand to work in the use of means. God hath appointed prayer as a help to our diligence, not as a cloak for our sloth. Idle beggars are welcome neither to God's door nor man's. What! wilt thou lift up thy hands to God in prayer, and then put them in thy pocket? Doth not God forbid our charity to him that worketh not? 'We commanded you, if any would not work, neither should he eat,' 2 Thess. iii. 10. And will he encourage that idleness in thee, which he would have punished by us? It is a good gloss of Bernard upon that of Lam. iii. 41: 'Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the heavens:' he that prayeth, and is diligent in the use of means, is the person that lifts up his heart with his hands to God. Look, therefore, Christian, thou minglest thy sweat with thy tears, thy labour with thy prayers. If thy prayer doth not set thee on work, neither will it set thy God at work for thee. Is it a lust thou art praying against? And dost thou sit down idle to see whether it will now die alone? Will that prayer slay one lust, that lets another (thy sloth I mean) live under its nose? As God will not save thy soul, so neither will he destroy thy sin, unless thy hand also be put to the work. See how God raised Joshua from off the earth, where he lay praying and mourning for Israel's defeat; 'Get thee up, wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath sinned,' &c. 'Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies,' &c. 'Up, sanctify the people,' Josh. vii. 10—13. O, how often may God rouse us up from our knees, and say, Why lie ye here with your lazy prayers? You have sinned in not taking my counsel, and obeying my orders. I bade you watch as well as pray; why do you not one as well as the other? My command obliges you to fly from the snare that Satan lays for you, as well as pray against it: therefore it is you cannot stand before your lusts. Moses durst not go to God with a prayer in behalf of sinning Israel, till he had shewn his zeal for God against their sin, and then he goes and speeds, Exod. xxxii. 25, compared with ver. 31. Dost thou think to walk loosely all day, yielding thyself, and betraying the glory of God into the hands of thy lust, and then mend all with a prayer

Digitized by Google

at night? Alas! thy cowardice and sloth will get to heaven before thy prayer, and put thee to shame, when thou comest on such an errand. The saint's prayer may miscarry from some secret grudge that is lodged in his heart against his brother. Anger and wrath are strange fire to put to our incense. It is a law written upon every gate of God's house (every ordinance, I mean), at which we are to enter into communion with God, that we must love our brethren. When we go to hear the word, what is the caveat, but that we should 'lay aside all malice, envy, and evil speaking, and as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word?' The gospel will not speak peace to a wrathful spirit. Anger and malice, like a salt-corroding humour in the stomach, make us throw up the milk of the word, that it cannot stay with us for nourishment. Is it the gospel-supper thou sittest at? This is a love-feast; and though it may be eaten with the bitter herbs of sin's sorrow, yet not with the sour leaven of wrath and malice; 1 Cor. xi. 18: 'When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you,' &c. Now, mark what follows, ver. 20: 'This is not to eat the Lord's supper.' Christ will not communicate with a wrangling, jangling company. When such guests come, he riseth from his own table, as David's children did from Absalom's upon the murder of their brother Amnon, 1 Sam. xiii. 29. And for prayer, you know the law thereof: 'Lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,' 1 Tim. ii. 8; implying that it is impossible to pray in faith and in wrath. Our prayer may be hindered two ways; by lying in any sin we commit against God; or in wrath, by not forgiving our brother's sin committed against us. Those two in our Lord's prayer cannot be divorced, 'Forgive us, as we forgive.' This is that which makes our prayers as ineffectual to us, as the plaster is to the wound in which the bullet still remains. Now the reason why God is so curious in this point is, because himself is so gracious; and he being *love*, can bid none welcome that are not *in love*. The heathens had such a notion, that the gods would not like the sacrifice and service of any, but such as were like themselves. And, therefore, to the sacrifices of Hercules none were to be admitted that were dwarfs: to the sacrifice of Bacchus, a merry god, none that were sad and pensive, as not suiting their genius. An excellent truth may be drawn from this their folly; he that would please God, must be like to God. Now our God is a God of peace; our heavenly Father is merciful; and therefore to him, none can have friendly access, but those that are children of peace, and merciful as their Father is. O, watch then thy heart, that Satan's fire-balls (which upon every little occasion he will be throwing in at thy window) take not hold of thy spirit, to kindle any heart-burning in thee against thy brother. If at any time thou seest the least smoke, or smellest the least scent of this fire in thy bosom, sleep not till it is quenched; be more careful to lay this fire in thy heart aside, when thou goest to bed, than that on thy hearth. How canst thou by prayer commit thyself into God's hands at night, when thou carriest a spark thereof smothered in thy breast? As a frail man, thou canst not hinder but such a spark may light on thee; yet, if thou wilt prove thyself a Christian, and have thy prayer find God's ear or heart open to it, thou must do thy utmost to quench it in thy brother's heart, as well as thy own. It is not enough that thou carriest peace in thy heart to him, except thou endeavourest that he may be at peace with thee also. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest thy brother hath aught against thee,' &c., Matt. v. 23: Jerome brings in the Christian here expostulating his cause with God, why he will not hear his prayer. 'What is it to me, Lord, that my brother is offended with me? I cannot help that. Wilt thou not receive my gift for his fault?' To whom he brings God thus answering: 'What is it, naughty servant, that thou sayest? I understand thy meaning: What is it to thee? Hast thou nothing against him? Dost thou love him? Wherefore then wouldst not thou save his soul? Go and beg of him to be at peace with thee, that thy brother's soul may be saved.' I speak the more of this particular, being sensible what an age of temptation we live in, by reason of the sad differences of judgment among Christians, which have changed their affections into wrath and bitterness; yea, a wonderful cure it will be, if it can be prevented from ending in an irrecoverable consumption of love among a great part of this present generation, especially considering what malignity is dropped into these church contentions by those national divisions

Digitized by Google

also that have fallen in with them, or rather sprung from them, and which drew so sad a sword among us, as for many years could find no other sheath but the bowels of this then miserable nation. Oh what grudges, animosities, and heart-burnings have these two produced! The sword, blessed be God, is at last got into its scabbard of peace; but have we not cause to wish it had been cleaner wiped when put up, and not such an implacable spirit of revenge and malice to be found remaining among many of us, as, alas! is too common to be met with everywhere? The storm without us is over, blessed be God, but is it not too high within some of our breasts? The flood of national calamities is assuaged; but now the tide is down and gone, is there not a deal of this filth, uncharitable jealousies, bitterness, wrath, and revenge, left behind upon our hearts,—enough to breed another plague and judgment among us, if a flood of national repentance does not wash away what the sea of war and other confusions have cast up? But if this were all the mischief they are likely to do us, our case is sad enough; they will hinder our prayers; for God will not accept such sacrifices as are kindled with the fire of wrath.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONTAINS THE FIRST CAUSE OF A SAINT'S PRAYER MISCARRYING,—WANT OF FAITH, AS ALSO WHAT TO PRAY IN FAITH IMPORTS.

THE Christian's prayer may miscarry for want of faith. Prayer is the bow, the promise is the arrow, and faith the hand which draws the bow, and sends this arrow with the heart's message to heaven. The bow without the arrow is of no use, and the arrow without the bow as little worth; and both without the strength of the hand are to no purpose. Neither the promise without prayer, nor prayer without the promise, nor both without faith, avails the Christian anything: so that what was said of the Israelites, that they could not enter into Canaan because of unbelief, the same may be said of many of our prayers, they cannot enter heaven with acceptation, because they are not put up in faith. Now, faith may be considered with a respect to the person praying, or to the prayer put up. The person must be a believer, but this is not enough; there must be an act of faith in the prayer, as well as the habit of faith dwelling in the person, Mark xi. 24: 'What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.' If the thing be not to be found in the promise that we desire, it is a sin to pray for it; if it be, it is a sin not to believe, when we pray for it, and that no small one, because thereby we both profane an ordinance, and asperse the name of the great God.

SECTION I.—But what is it to pray in faith? Negatively, it is not to believe that the very thing in specie, or in its proper kind, that we pray for, shall be always given. Christ prayed in faith, and was heard. He believed not the thing in kind to be given, neither was it, yet his prayer was answered; therefore be sure thou learnest the right method of exercising thy faith in prayer, which must be taken from the nature of the promise thou puttest in suit. As water receives its figure from the vessel it is poured into, so our faith is to be shaped by the promise; if that be absolute, (as things necessary to salvation,) then thy faith may expect the very thing promised; if otherwise, then thou art not to limit thy faith to the thing itself, but expect money or money's worth; health, or as good as health; deliverance, or better than deliverance. An absolute faith on a conditional promise (without an immediate revelation, which we must not look for,) is fancy, not faith; to commit a sin, not act a grace, this is to be free on God's purse without a grant: for we put more in the conclusion of our faith than is in the premises of the promise; and this is as bad divinity as logic.

SECTION II.—Positively, to pray in faith, is to ask of God, in the name of Christ, what he hath promised, relying on his power and truth for performance, without binding him up to time, manner, or means. First, We must ask what God hath promised, or else we choose for ourselves, and not beg; we subject God's will to ours, and not ours to his; we forge a bond, and then claim it as a debt, which is a horrible presumption. He that is his own promiser, must be his own paymaster. Secondly, To pray in faith, we must pray in Christ's name; as there can be no faith but on a promise, so no promise can be

Digitized by Google

claimed but in his name, because they are both made to him, and performed for him. They are made to him, the covenant being struck with him: 'In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,' Tit. i. 2. And there was none then existing but Christ to whom the promise could be made. So that as the child claims his estate in right of his father that purchased it, so we come to our right in the promise as heirs of, and coheirs with Christ. And as the promise was made to him, so it is performed for him, because his blood shed was the condition of the obligation upon which God acknowledged the debt to Christ, and bound himself to perform all the articles of the covenant to his heirs, claiming them at his hands in his name. It is not, therefore, enough boldly to urge God with a promise,—Pardon, Lord, for thou hast promised it; grace and glory, for thou hast promised them; but we must, if we mean to lay our plea legally, according to the law of faith, plead for these under the protection of his name. Thus Daniel laid the stress of his prayer on Christ,—'Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant,—and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake,' chap. ix. 17.

SECTION III.—To this praying in faith is required a relying on God, through Christ, for a gracious answer. Let the former be done, and the creature fail in this, he prays not in faith, but takes the name of God and Christ in vain. This act of relying is the taking hold on God in prayer. When mariners, in a storm, cast out their anchor, and it comes home again without taking hold on the firm ground, so as to stay the ship, and bear it up against the violence of the waves, it gives them no help; so neither doth a prayer that takes no hold on God. Therefore you shall find, that when a Christian speeds well in prayer, his happy success is attributed not to naked prayer, but as clothed and empowered with this act of recumbency upon God, 2 Chron. xiii. 14: 'They cried unto the Lord.' Now see ver. 18: 'The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers.' He doth but lie in prayer that doth not rely on God after praying. What he seems to give with one hand to God, he takes from him with another, which is no better than mocking God. By praying we pretend to expect good from him; by not relying, we blot this out, and declare we look for no such thing. Now, this reliance of the soul hath a twofold way whereby it fastens on God, like the anchor's double hook. First, It takes hold on the power of God; thus Christ, in his agony, 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death.' In prayer we open our case to God, declare what sinful, weak, shiftless creatures we are, and then we commit our cause to God. Now, as none will put that to another's keeping, which he thinks safe in his own hands, so neither will any deliver it to another, of whose ability he is not first persuaded to effect that which himself is unable to do. See Eliphaz's counsel to Job, chap. v. 8: 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause;' as if he had said,—If I were in your case, I will tell you what course I would take; I would not look this way or that, but speedily hasten to the throne of grace; and when once I had told God my very heart, I would trouble myself no more, but commit my cause to him, and discharge my heart of the burden of all its troublesome thoughts. But under what notion would he do all this? The next words will tell us,—'Unto God would I commit my cause, which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.' First, he would rest his faith on God, as able to do great things, and then leaving his request lodged in the arms of such power, he doubted not but he could cast all care away, and enjoy the serenity of his mind, whatever his condition was. Indeed, this is the first stone faith lays in her building. And an error in the foundation will make the whole house weak. Be sure, therefore, thou layest this bottom stone with thy greatest care. O how unbecoming is it to have a great God, and a little faith on this great God! A strong God, and a weak faith on his almighty power! Unbelief here ravisheth and offereth violence to the very light of nature: for his eternal power and Godhead are known by the visible things of the creation, Rom. i. 10. What is he not able to do, that could make so goodly a fabric without materials, tools, or workmen? Away with a question which so grates the ears of the Almighty,—Can he pardon.—Can he purge? What cannot he do that can do

Digitized by Google

what he will? Secondly, It takes hold of the faithfulness of God to perform the promise; we are directed, in committing ourselves to him, to eye his faithfulness; 'As unto a faithful Creator,' 1 Pet. iv. 19. The saints' faith hath been remarkable in staying themselves on this, while yet the mercy prayed for lay asleep in its causes: Psa. lxv. 1, 2, 'Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion; and unto thee shall the vow be performed, O thou that hearest prayer!' And yet that good day was not come; for even then he cries out, 'Iniquities prevail against me!' ver. 3. So Psa. cxl. 12, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.' Why, how comes he so confident? 'Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name,' ver. 12; as if he had said, Thou hast a name for a gracious and faithful God in thy promise, and this thou wilt never suffer to be blotted by failing in thy word. Christian, thou mayest venture all thou art worth on the public faith of Heaven: 'His words are pure, as silver tried seven times in a furnace.' He that will not suffer a liar or covenant-breaker to set foot on his holy hill, will much less suffer any one thought of falseness or unfaithfulness to enter into his own most holy heart.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOUR RULES WHEREBY WE MAY KNOW WHETHER WE EXERCISE FAITH IN PRAYER.

But how may I know when I thus exercise faith in prayer? First, By the serenity and composure of thy spirit after prayer. Faith may live in a storm, but it will not suffer a storm to live in it. As faith rises, so the blustering wind of discontented, troublesome thoughts go down. In the same proportion that there is faith in the heart there is peace also; they are joined together: Isa. xxx. 15, 'In returning shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength; therefore called 'peace in believing,' Rom. xv. 13. Even where it is weakest, it will not let the unquietness of the heart pass without a chiding: Psa. xlii. 5, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God.' What soul! no sooner off thy knees, but clamorous! Hast not thou made thy moan to a God able to help thee, and will not that ease thee? Faith relieves the soul in prayer of that which oppresses it; whereas the unbelieving soul still carries about it the cause of its trouble, because it had not strength to cast forth its sorrows, and roll its cares upon God in the duty. Dost thou carry away the same burden on thy back from prayer which thou didst bring to it? Surely thou didst want faith to lift it off thy shoulder. Had faith been there active and lively it would have bestowed this, and brought thee away with a light heart, as Hannah, who rose from praying to 'eat, and her countenance was no more sad;' and as Christ, who kneeled down with as sorrowful a heart as ever any had, but comes off with a holy courage to go and meet his approaching death and his bloody enemies now on their way to attack him: 'Arise,' saith he to his disciples, 'let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me,' Matt. xxvi. 46. May it not put us to the blush to think that we should come less satisfied from God's presence than sometimes from a sorry man? If you were poor, and had a rich friend that bids you send your children to him, and he will provide for them, would not this ease your mind of all your cares and distracting thoughts concerning their maintenance? And doth not God promise more than this when he bids us 'Be careful for nothing, but let your requests be made known to God with thanksgiving?' Secondly, Dost thou continue praying even when God continues to deny? An unbelieving heart will be sure to jade in a long journey. Faith will throw in the net of prayer again and again, as long as God commands, and the promise encourageth. The greyhound hunts by sight; when he cannot see the game he gives over running; but the true hound hunts by scent; he goes over hedge and ditch, though he sees not the hare he pursues all day long. An unbelieving heart, may be, is drawn out, upon some visible probabilities and sensible hopes of a mercy coming to pray; but when these are out of sight, his heart fails him; but faith keeps the scent of the promise, and gives not over the chase. Thirdly, Dost thou stint God, or canst thou trust him to answer thy prayer in his own way without thy prescription? when

Digitized by Google

we deal with a man whose ability or faithfulness we have in doubt, then we labour to make sure of him by tying him up to our terms; but if we stand assured of their power and truth, we leave them to themselves. Thus the patient sends for the physician, desires his help, but leaves him to write his own bill. The merchant sends over his goods to his factor, and relies on him to make such returns as his wisdom tells him will come to the best market. Thus the believing soul, when he hath opened his heart to God in prayer, resigns himself to the goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness of God to return an answer: 'Remember me, O God,' said Nehemiah, 'concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy,' chap. xiii. 22. See here, this good man makes bold to be God's remembrancer, but dares not be his counsellor or prescriber; he remits the shaping of the answer to the greatness of his mercy. Hence it follows that whatever way God cometh in, the believing soul bids him welcome. Doth he pray for health, and miss of that? yet he blesseth God for support under sickness. Doth he pray for his children, and they, notwithstanding, prove a cross? yet he finds an answer another way, and satisfies himself with it. After many a prayer that David had put up, no doubt, for his family, we find him entertaining an answer to those prayers with a composed spirit, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5: 'Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant;' and this, he tells us, is all his desire. Indeed, a believer cannot miss his desires: Psa. cxlv. 19, 'He will fulfil the desires of them that fear him,' because they disown those desires which clash with God's will. Who could pray more fervently for their children than Job did for his? He was with God for them every day; but after all his religious care of them, he meets with heavy tidings, and hears that they were made a sacrifice by death, for whom he had offered up so many sacrifices to God; yet doth he not foolishly charge God, or say it was in vain that he prayed: no, that ointment was not lost, the savour whereof was poured into his own soul, from the posture of which he might read a gracious answer in the supporting grace that enabled him to love and bless God over the grave of his slain children. Fourthly, By the soul's comporting itself towards the means used for obtaining the mercy prayed for. First, If thou prayest in faith, it will set thee to use other means besides prayer. Mark how the apostle joins these together, Rom. xii. 11, 12, 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,—continuing instant in prayer.' As faith useth her wings of prayer to fly to heaven, so she useth her feet of duty and obedience with which she walks and bestirs herself on earth. Secondly, Faith will make thee to be choice of the means thou usest for the obtaining what thou bespeakest of God in prayer. Faith is a working grace, but it will be set on work by none but God. Am I in God's way? saith faith. Is this the means he hath appointed? If it be not, away he turns from it, disdaining to work with any of the devil's tools. God can answer my prayer, saith the believer, without the help of my sin. If riches be good for me, I need not be at the cost to purchase them with a lie or a cheat. If health be a mercy, he can send me it, though I advise not with the devil's doctors. If joy and comfort, there is no need to take down the devil's music. If times be evil, he can hide me, without running under the skirt of this great man by base flattery and dissimulation. When Ezra had committed himself and his company to God, (now under their march towards Jerusalem,) by a solemn day of fasting and prayer, and had made a holy boast of his God, what he would do for them that seek him, he thought it both unbeseeming his professed faith, and also dishonourable to his God, whom he had so magnified in the hearing of the Persian king, to beg any armed troops for a convoy to them in their way, lest his faith should be brought into suspicion for an empty bravado and groundless confidence: chap. viii. 22, 'I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.' Thirdly, If thy faith be exercised in prayer, it will make thee not only choice of the means thou usest, but careful in using the means that God chooseth for thee. Thou wilt be afraid lest it should stand in God's light, by stealing thy confidence, from him to trust in it. Faith will teach thee to use means as God's ordinance, but rely on God to bless it. While faith's hand is on the plough, her eye is in heaven: the influences of heaven, not the tillage of the husbandman, make it

Digitized by Google

a fruitful year. Sometimes the physician appoints a powder to be taken in wine or beer. Now, it is not the beer or wine that does the cure, but the powder, which they are only used to convey and carry into the stomach. Thus mercy is handed over to us by the blessing of God in the use of means, yet think not the means do it, but the blessing of God mingled with it, and infused into it. Lastly, If thou actest faith in prayer, as thou wilt be careful to improve means when God provides them, so thou wilt not suspend thy faith when God denies them. The believing soul dares not trust to the means when he hath them, therefore he dares not distrust God when he wants them. Faith knows, though God used means, yet he needs none. The sun and showers are the means he useth for the growth of the grass and herbs: yet he made these to grow out of the earth, Gen. i. 11, before there was sun or rain. Ploughing and sowing is the ordinary means whereby man is provided with bread: but he fed Israel with bread without their pains and husbandry. Ships are the means to waft us over the seas: but God carried Israel through the Red Sea without ship or boat. May be times are hard, and thou art poor; thy expense is great, and thy comings-in little; with the widow, thou art making thy last cake of the little meal that is left; to reason and sense thou must either beg, steal, or die. Canst thou now, upon praying to thy God, wait upon his promise, which tells thee, 'Verily, thou shalt be fed,' Psa. xxxvii. 3; and on his providence, which records his care of the sparrows on purpose to assure us he will much more provide for his children? Or, at least, dost thou chide thy heart for its distrustful fears after praying, charging it to hope in God, to whom thou hast made thy moan? Truly, if thy heart hath not some hold on God after duty, in this thy strait, either thou hast no faith, or if thou hast faith, thou didst not act it in that prayer. True faith will either expel these dejections of heart, or at least protest against them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND POLICY, WITH WHICH SATAN LABOURS TO DEFEAT THE SAINT, THAT IS, TO WHISPER FALSE FEARS INTO HIS EAR, THAT HIS PRAYER IS NOT HEARD.

Now we come to the second stratagem that Satan useth to hinder the success of the Christian's prayer (which I called a partial hindrance, or miscarriage thereof), when the prayer itself is not lost (which comes to pass only when it finds not acceptance with God), but when the Christian doth not believe on earth, that his prayer is heard in heaven (though indeed it is), and so by his questioning thereof, he loseth the revenue of that present peace, which otherwise would be paid in unto him from the expectation of its certain return with a joyful answer. As a merchant who gives his ship up for lost, when indeed it is safe, richly laden, and only stays for a fair wind; he, not knowing or believing this, puts himself to as much trouble and sorrow, as if it were in truth as he feared. Fancy and imagination, even when without ground and reason, are able to produce real effects and sad consequences, in the minds of men. The false news of Joseph's death caused as much sorrow to old Jacob, yea more, than if he had seen him laid out, and followed him to the grave. The jailor, from a fear his prisoners were gone, and he being accountable for them, had killed himself by falling on his own sword, if Paul had not seasonably cried out, 'We are all here, do thyself no harm.' And truly our unbelieving fears have no less power upon our hearts; they rob the Christian of the joy of his life, and man is but a sour piece of clay when that is gone. It is not praying, but believing prayer is heard, that will make a glad heart, and a cheerful countenance. Hannah often prayed: she was acquainted with the work many years, yet never had the burden of her spirit taken off, till she had faith she should speed: yea, moreover, fears weaken the spirit of prayer; he that expects little from prayer, will not be much in prayer. That trade is best attended to, which it is hoped will pay a man best for his pains in it. 'Who is there among you,' saith God, 'that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on my altar for nought,' Mal. i. 10. The husbandman throws his seed freely, because he sows in hope; and his most precious seed on his fattest soil, because there he looks to find it again with the greatest increase. This made David so fond of praying, that he will never leave it; 'I have prayed, and the Lord hath heard

Digitized by Google

therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' As a merchant finding his precious gain coming in, converts his whole estate into stock; so David devotes himself wholly to prayer; 'For my love, they are my adversaries: but I was in prayer.' This was the only weapon I lifted up for my defence against all their darts: whereas unbelief betrays the soul into many uncomely thoughts of God, which reflect sadly upon his name, so as to weaken his reputation in the creature's thoughts, and bring him either to a disuse of this duty, or hopeless performance of it; and this Satan loves as his life. When a merchant thinks his goods miscarry, he grows jealous of his factor; questioning his care, faithfulness, or ability to despatch his business: such whisperings we shall hear, if we listen to our unbelieving hearts sometimes, when our prayers make not so short and quick a voyage as we desire. It was a high charge Job brought against God,—'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not,' chap. xxx. 20. This holy man was now as deep in God's books, and as great a favourite with him, as ever, yet so far had Satan wound into him, as to make him listen unto those false reports which he brought unto him of God, (taking the advantage of his present cloudy providence to colour his calumnies), insomuch that he began to give credit unto this liar. Now if this may become a stone of offence to a Job, how much more mayest thou fear dashing thy foot against it! Let it be thy care to defeat Satan in this spiteful plot against God and thee. Surely it should not be a little matter that makes thee throw up thy prayers, and give away so rich an adventure as thou hast swimming in this bottom. Esau hath the brand of a profane person, for so cheaply parting with his inheritance; if thou be a believer, thou art an heir of promise, and among promises this is not the least, that what thou askest in Christ's name, believing, thou shalt receive. If it were profane in Esau to part with his inheritance, how much more is it in thee, to part with thy heritage, which thou canst not do without impeaching the faithfulness of God, that gave thee an estate in the promise? We highly commend Job for his heroic resolution at another time, chap. xxvii. 5, 'God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove my integrity from me.' How much more shouldst thou say to Satan, God forbid that I should justify thee, thou wicked fiend, or thy false charge against my God: I will hold fast his integrity and faithfulness till I die. Surely Daniel, who ventured his life rather than not pray, would have parted with a thousand lives, rather than have given up his prayers for lost, and thereby have blotted the good name of God, whose faithfulness stands bound to return every prayer of faith with a gracious answer into the saints bosom. But the more to fortify you against this design of Satan, let us inquire into a few of those arguments with which Satan leads the Christian into this temptation, if not absolutely to conclude, yet unbelievingly to dispute and question it in his heart, whether his prayer be heard or no. I shall reduce them to three heads.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SAINT'S ARMS AGAINST SATAN'S FIRST CAVIL AT HIS PRAYERS.

First, Satan makes the Christian out of love with himself and duty, from the sinful infirmities cleaving to both, thereby to quash his hope of any favourable reception that his prayer hath found in heaven. What! thy stammering prayers make music in God's ear! Will the Lord foul his fingers with thy besmeared duties? If thou wert a Samuel or Daniel, and couldst claim the place among those worthies that are renowned for the eminent service they have done God in their generation, then thou mightest hope to have the ear of God: but thou art a puny stripling, a froward child, in whom there is more sin than grace, and dost thou think to be heard? Truly, though this argument weighs little, having no countenance from the tenor of the covenant, whose privileges are not appropriated to a few favourites, more eminent in grace than their brethren, but stand open to the whole family, it being a common salvation, and a like precious faith, that all the saints partake of; yet it is the great bugbear with which many of them are scared. A word or two, therefore, to arm thee against it; only, I must take for granted that these sinful infirmities are lamented, and not

Digitized by Google

encouraged by thee. This granted, for thy comfort know, they are not so offensive to God, as to thyself. Thy prayers pass such a refining in Christ's mediation, that their ill scent is taken away. Doth thy scruple arise from the sinful failings of thy daily conversation and Christian course? To remove this, observe how the Spirit of God, when he instanceth in Elias, as a person whose prayers were exceedingly prevalent with God, doth not describe him by the transcendency of his grace above others, but by his infirmities like unto them: 'Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not,' James v. 17. As if God should say, Were I so curious in my scrutiny as you fear, Elias's prayer would have been stopped, for he was not without his infirmities. How many failings do we find in David's unseemly carriage before Achish, for which he was turned out of the king's presence under the notion of a madman! yet his prayer at that time, when he betrayed so many unbelieving fears, found favour with God; Psa. xxxiv. 4, 'I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.' Read the title, and you shall find it, A Psalm of David, who changed his behaviour before Achish, who drove him away, and he departed. Are they the sinful infirmities which escape thee in the duty of prayer? Canst thou find more in any prayer thou puttest up, than were in the disciples', for one so short?—where they exercised so little faith that Christ calls it no faith; Mark iv. 40, 'Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?' Yea, they pray to Christ and chide him in the same breath, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' Yet Christ could find sincerity hid in their infirmities, and granted their request. It is true he rebuked them, but it is as true that he rebuked the wind also. God's promise for hearing of prayer, shall not be made void by the saint's weakness in prayer; yea, for thy farther comfort, know, that the less power these have to shake or disturb thy spirit in expecting a gracious answer, the more kindly will God take it at thy hand. 'Abraham,' it is said, 'believed, not considering his own body, or the deadness of Sarah's womb;' and for this was highly commended, because he thereby did signally glorify the power of God to which he believed their bodily indisposition should not be any obstacle. Truly, thus it will be highly pleasing to God, if thou canst rely, not staggering at thy spiritual indispositions, and that deadness of thy heart which rises up as a great objection in thy thoughts against the success of thy prayer: for by this, thou givest Christ both the honour of his death, through which thou hast this free access for thy weak prayers to the throne of grace, and also of his intercession, which clarifies them all from their sinful mixtures.

CHAPTER XXV.

A THREEFOLD ARGUMENT WHICH SATAN DRAWS FROM GOD'S DEPORTMENT TO THE CHRISTIAN IN AND AFTER PRAYER, TO MAKE HIM QUESTION ITS ACCEPTANCE.

SATAN draws his argument from God's deportment to the soul in and after prayer; in which, three things he commonly insists upon, by them to create trouble to the Christian's thoughts. First, his silence, which he would have the Christian interpret to be God's slighting or disregarding of him and his prayer. Secondly, His frowns, from which he would have him conclude, neither he nor his duty are accepted. Thirdly, His not giving the mercy in kind; and this he tells the Christian, amounts to a denial.

SECTION I.—His silence after prayer. As wicked men sometimes sin, and God keeps silence, which makes them bold to think God approves of them and their way; so sometimes a gracious soul prays, and God holds his peace here also; and the poor soul begins to fear, that neither his person nor his duty are approved of God. Now, Satan, knowing what thoughts are likely to rise in the Christian's own heart, falls in, and joins issue with the Christian's bosom enemy, labouring to confirm him in these his unbelieving fears. To help thee out of this, First, Learn to distinguish between God's hearing, and his answering the saint's prayer. Every faithful prayer is heard, and makes an acceptable report in God's ear as soon as it is shot; but God doth not always thus speedily answer it. The father at the reading of his son's letter (which comes haply on

Digitized by Google

some begging errand) likes the motion, his heart closeth with it, and a grant is there passed; but he takes his own time to send his despatch, and let his son know it. Princes have their books of remembrance, wherein they write the names of their favourites whom they intend to prefer, haply some years before their gracious purpose opens itself to them. Mordecai's name stood in Ahasuerus's book some while before his honour was conferred. Thus God records the names of his saints and their prayers. 'The Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, of them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name,' Mal. iii. 16. But, perhaps, they hear not of God in his providential answer for a long time after. Abraham prays for a child, and is heard, but how many years interpose before he hath him in his arms! Truly, so many, that he goes in to Hagar, (partly by his wife's counsel, and his own weakness,) to obtain that with a by-blow for which God himself had undertaken. Take heed thou be not led into this temptation, to question whether God hears thee, because thou hearest not from him presently. Be patient, and thou shalt find, the longer a mercy goes before its delivery, the more perfect it will come forth at last. God gave a speedy answer to Abraham for his son Ishmael; 'Oh that Ishmael might live!' Gen. xvi. 18. 'I have heard thee,' saith God, 'concerning Ishmael,' ver. 20. Indeed, he flourished, and spread into a great nation, almost before Isaac's stem had budded. What a small number was the family of Jacob at their going down into Egypt! But when the date of God's bond was nearly expiring, and the time of their promise grew nigh, then God paid interest for his stay. None gain more at the throne of grace, than those who trade for time, and can forbear the payment of a mercy longest. Secondly, Consider, when thou findest the deepest silence in God's providence, concerning the thing prayed for, then thou hast a loud answer in the promise. Say not, therefore, Who shall ascend to heaven? to bring thee intelligence whether thy prayer hath got safe thither, and had favourable audience in God's ear. God himself hath saved thee this labour; the promise will satisfy thee, which assures thee, that if it be duly qualified, it cannot find the heart of God shut against it: 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much, James v. 16. So assured have the saints been of this, that they, before any inkling from providence hath been heard, (to bring them the news of a mercy coming,) have taken up joy upon the credit of the naked promise, and feasted themselves with the hopes of what they expected, but had not yet received, at the cost and charge of God's faithfulness, with which the promise is sealed: 'In God I will praise his word,' Psa. lvi. 4. Mark the phrase: he had not as yet the desired mercy, only a word of promise, that it should come; and considering the power and truth of God, the promiser, he is as merry as if he were put in possession of it, and pays his praises before God performs the promise.

Section II.—The second thing which Satan gathers from God's deportment toward the Christian, thereby to bring the hearing of his prayer into question, in his anxious thoughts, is some anger which seems to sit upon his brow against the Christian. It cannot be denied but sometimes a dear saint of God may go away from duty with an aching heart, by reason of the sad impressions of an angry God left upon his spirit. And when thus it fares with the Christian, Satan's time is come, he thinks, to lead him into this temptation, by persuading him he may read what entertainment his prayer had at God's hands, in the language of his countenance, and his carriage toward him. If God, saith he, had heard thy prayer, would he handle thee thus? No, sure; he would rather have taken thee up into his arms, and kissed thee with the kisses of his mouth, than thus trample thee under his feet. Thou shouldst have had darts of love shot from his pitiful eye, to intimate the purposes of his grace, and not arrows headed with his wrath, to stick in thy soul, and thus drink up thy very spirits. Can these be the wounds of a friend? This the deportment of one that means thee well? This was the temptation which ruffled Job's thoughts, and embittered his spirit, chap. ix. 17. He could not believe God answered his prayer, because he broke him with his tempest. As if God's mercy came always in the still voice, and never in the whirlwind. Now, in this case, take this double counsel. First, Inquire whether this tempest comes to find any Jonah in thy ship; whether it takes thee sinning, or soaking in any past sin unrepented; or whether thy con-

Digitized by Google

science, diligently listened to, doth witness that thou art sincere in thy course, though compassed with many failings. If it overtakes thee in any runaway voyage with Jonah, or rambling course with the prodigal from thy Father's house, then, indeed, thou hast reason to question; yea, it is beyond all question, that an acceptable prayer in this posture cannot drop from thy lips. What! run from God, and then send to him thy prayers! This is to desire mercy to spend upon thy lust. But if, upon thy faithful search, thou findest this storm overtakes thee in the way of duty and exercise of thy sincerity, like the tempest that met the disciples at sea, when at Christ's command they launched forth, be not discouraged; for it is ordinary with God to put on the disguise of an angry countenance, and to use rough language, when his heart is resolved upon ways of mercy, and meditates love to his people. Jacob, you know, wrestled hard and long, before victory inclined to his side. And the woman of Canaan was sent away like a dog, with harsh language, who at last was owned of Christ for a dear child, and sent away to her heart's content. Sincerity needs fear no ill from God. This very consideration kept Job's head at another time above water, chap. xvi. 12. There we find God taking him by the neck, shaking him, as it were, to pieces, and setting him up for his mark: but, ver. 17, this upheld his troubled spirit, that all this befell him walking in the way of obedience; 'Not for any injustice in my hands; also my prayer is pure:' wherefore he rears up his confidence, ver. 19, 20: 'Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record on high; my friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God.' The holy man was not for all this scared from the throne of grace, but still looked on God, though with tears in his eyes, expecting good news at last, after so much bad. And we have warrant to do the same; 1 John iii. 21, 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.'

Secondly, Inquire whether, under these frowns from God, there be yet a spirit of prayer working in thee. Haply thou canst not deny but that thy heart is rather stirred up from these to lament after the Lord with more restless sighs and groans, to pray with more feeling and fervency, than driven away from duty. This spirit of prayer upheld in thee, may assure thee of these two things. First, That the cloud of anger which seems to sit on God's brow, is not in his heart. It is but a thin veil, through which thy faith might see the working of his bowels toward thee. The presence of the Spirit of God at work thus in a soul, cannot stand with his real anger. If his wrath were up, this in thee would be down. Thou shouldst have him soon calling back his ambassador of peace, at least, suspend and withdraw his assistance. When that sad breach was made between God and David in the matter of Uriah, David's harp was presently out of tune, his right hand had forgot its cunning, and the spirit of prayer received a sad damp in his heart. Where is the psalm to be found that was penned by David in that interregnum of his grace? I do not say he never did pray all the time he lay soaking in that sin; but those prayers were not fit to be joined with the holy breathings of that Spirit which actuated him before his fall, and after his recovery; therefore, when by repentance he came to himself, like one recovering out of a dangerous sickness, (which had for a time taken away his senses,) he begins to feel himself weak, and how much the Spirit of grace was by his sin enfeebled in him; which makes him so vehemently beg, that God would renew a right spirit in him, and not take his holy Spirit from him, Psa. li. 11, 12. The Spirit is so choice and peculiar a mercy, that if thou canst find lively actings of his grace in thee, (and where are they more sensibly felt than in prayer, helping the soul to sighs and groans which cannot be uttered?) thou canst not, in reason, think God is not friends with thee, though it were at present as dark as midnight with thy soul. Secondly, It may assure thee that his ear is open to thy cry, when his face is hid from thine eye. For, consider but who this Spirit is that thus helps thee in prayer, and furnisheth thee with all thy spiritual ammunition with which thou so batterest the throne of grace; is he not one that knows the mind of God, and that would not have a hand in that petition which should not be welcome to heaven? Having, therefore, this assistance from the Spirit, doubt not thy acceptance with the Father. In a word, the Spirit that helps thee to thy groans and sighs in prayer, is no other than that God thou prayest to; and will God deny himself? This I conceive a principal part of that scripture's meaning, Isa. xlv. 19, 'I said not unto the seed of

Digitized by Google

Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.' That is, Whenever I stir up a soul to pray, and empower him with my Spirit to perform it feelingly, fervently, and after a holy manner, it is always to purpose. God never said thus to any, 'Seek ye me in vain.'

SECTION III.—The third thing from which Satan takes his advantage, to breed scruples in the Christian's mind concerning the acceptance of his prayer, is the denial of the mercy in kind which is prayed for. We are prone enough to have such thoughts ourselves, and Satan will not be wanting to feed any bad humour that is stirring in us. Or if our hearts seem pacified with this dealing of God, he hath his ways and wiles to conjure up this evil spirit of discontent and unbelief. On this errand he sent Job's wife, to make him think and speak evil of God: 'Dost thou still retain thy integrity?' As if she had said, What! art thou at thy old work,—still praying and praising God? Dost thou not see how much he regards thee, or thy serving of him? What hast thou got by all thy devotion? Is not thy estate gone; thy children slain and buried in one grave; and thyself left a poor, loathsome cripple? Thy life serving for nothing but to make thee feel thy present misery, and feed on thy past crosses. Indeed, it requires a good insight into the nature of the promises, and the divers ways God takes to fulfil them, to enable us to spell an answer out of a denial of the thing we pray for; yet such a 'good understanding have all they that do his commandments,' Psa. cxi. 10. They can clear God, and justify his faithfulness in all his dealings, though, when he comes to answer their prayers, he chooseth not to enter in at that door which they set open for him, nor treads in the very steps of their express desires. The whole psalm contains a testimony given to the faithfulness of God in his providential works, at which though a carnal eye (from the mysteries hid therein) takes offence, yet the gracious soul, by his more curious observance of, and inquiry into them, finds a sweet harmony between them and the promise; and therefore he concludes, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.' They having a key to God's character, can read the hand of his providence, and so are able to praise him (knowing him faithful) when others are ready to curse him. But to help thee out, or keep thee from falling into this temptation, in the first place, consider what mercy it is that God denies thee: is it not of that sort of blessings which are not necessary unto thy happiness as a saint? Such all temporal mercies are. The kingdom of God consists not in meat and drink; thou wilt find an absolute denial for no other; he hath bid us take no denial for his love and favour, grace and glory; 'Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his face evermore,' Psa. cv. 4; that is, be not put off for these, but live and die at God's door till he brings this alms to thee. Well, we will take this for granted. It is a temporal mercy thou art denied. Now, when thou art tempted to question the love of God, or acceptance of thy prayer, let me desire thee to weigh this threefold consideration. First, Consider how ill God may take this at thy hand, and that in a double respect. First, That thou dost suspect his love upon so slight and trivial a matter, as the temporal enjoyments of this life are, which he thinks have not worth enough to be put into the promise any otherwise than they are subservient to the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant; 'Seek first the kingdom of heaven, and these things shall be added unto you,' Matt. vi. 33; that is, as you need them. He casts them into the other, (more grand blessings,) as a tradesman would thread and paper unto a parcel of rich commodities. Suppose a child should ask his father for money to buy some trifle, (that pleaseth his green head,) but the father denies him: now, if the child should go and make proclamation in the open street to the disgrace of his father, that his father did neither love nor regard him, though he wants neither food nor raiment, would this be well taken at the child's hand? This thou dost in this case, though thou thinkest not so much: and hath not thy heavenly Father more reason to question thy love, for taking away his good name, than thou to suspect his for his denial? But again, he may take it ill that thou hast aspersed his wisdom. Is there no way but this for the wise God to shew his love, and answer thy prayer? Cannot he deny health and give patience? Take away thy estate, and turn it into contentment; teaching thee to be abased, and to bless God thou art made low? He

Digitized by Google

that will make thee so happy in heaven, where few of this world's enjoyments shall be seen, cannot he make thy life comfortable on earth without some of them? Secondly, Consider how thou prayedst when thou didst meet with this denial. Didst thou pray peremptorily, and absolutely, or conditionally, with submission to the will of God? If peremptorily, thou wert beside the rule, and art the cause why the prayer came back without its errand. God will not hear or bear commanding prayers; he that must have a temporal mercy, if he gets it, may have a spiritual curse, but he is sure to get a temporal cross. So Delilah proved to Samson, who would not take his parents' counsel, but must have her, whatever comes of it,—'Get her me, for she pleaseth me well,' Judges xiv. 3. But he paid dearly for his choice. May be such an enjoyment pleaseth thee well, thy carnal heart is in love with it, and that sets thee a praying inordinately for it. Alas! poor creature, if thou hadst it, what wouldst thou do with it? Thou wouldst fondly lay thy head in its lap, and let it rock thy grace asleep, and then betray thee into the hand of some sin; but if thou prayest with a submissive spirit, on condition God liked it as well as thyself: why then dost thou now recant thy prayer, seeing God hath declared his will, that it is not good for thee to have thy desire? Wilt thou not be determined by him, to whom thou didst refer thyself? Hast thou not reason to think that God takes the best way for thee? There is never a prayer put up but God doth, as it were, weigh and ponder it, and then his love sets his wisdom on work to make such a return as may be most for his own glory, and his child's good. Now, it being the product of such infinite wisdom and love, thou oughtest to acquiesce in it, yea to praise God for it. Thus did David in a great strait: 'O my God, I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not,' Psalm xxii. 2. Well, what hears God from him, now he hears nothing from God, as to the deliverance prayed for? No murmuring at God's proceedings; nay, he hears quite the contrary, for he justifies and praises God, verse 3: 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel!' Thirdly, Observe whether thou canst not gather something from the manner of God's denying the thing prayed for, which may sweeten it to thee. Haply thou shalt find he denies thee, but it is with a smiling countenance, and ushers it in with some expressions of grace and favour, that may assure thee his denial proceeds not from displeasure. As you would do with a dear friend, who, may be, comes to borrow a sum of money of you, lend it you dare not, because you see plainly it is not for his good; but in giving him the denial, lest he should misinterpret it, as proceeding from want of love and respect, you preface it with some kind of language of your hearty affection to him, as that you love him, and therefore deny him, and shall be ready to do for him more than that comes to. Thus God sometimes wraps up his denials in such sweet intimations of love, as prevents all jealousies arising in the hearts of his people. When David was denied to build a temple for God, he gave him a large testimony of his affection, how highly he accepted his good-will therein; though he should not build a temple for him, yet his desire was so kindly taken, that God would build a house for him that should last for ever. Thus sometimes a faithful minister prays earnestly that God would bless his labours to the converting of his people, and is denied, yet intimations of God's love to his person are dropt, with a promise that his reward is with the Lord; so that his prayer, though denied as to them, is returned with peace into his own bosom. Another prays passionately, Oh that he might see Jerusalem a quiet habitation! and that truth and peace might flourish in his days. This my be is not granted, because his desire antedates the period which God hath fixed in his purpose for the fulfilling of his promise to his church; but he manifests his love to him, and expresseth how highly he respects his love to the church. Thus God did by Daniel, to whom an angel was sent, to let him know what kind entertainment his prayer had, and that he was a man greatly beloved of God, Dan. ix. 23. So in temporal mercies, haply thou art pleading with God for deliverance out of this trouble and that affliction, and it is denied thee; but a message with the denial that doubly recompenseth it; may be, some sweet declaration of his love he drops into thy bosom, or assurance of seasonable succours, that shall be sent in to enable thee to charge through them with faith and victory. So God dealt with Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' I hope now thou wilt not say thy prayer is lost. When Saul sought his father's asses, was he not shrewdly hurt to find a

Digitized by Google

kingdom instead of them? The holy women that went to the sepulchre to anoint the body of Jesus with their spices, did not lose their labour though they found him risen. What are all the enjoyments of the world to the spiritual mercies and comfort of the promises which thou findest in thy attendance on God? Not so much as the dead body to our risen Saviour. Thou findest not some dead creature comfort, but thou meetest with embraces from a living God.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW TO KNOW WHETHER A MERCY COMES TO US BY COMMON PROVIDENCE, OR AS A GRACIOUS ANSWER TO PRAYER, RESOLVED.

THE last thing Satan abuseth the Christian with, to make him doubtful of the acceptance of his prayer, and also to question, when a mercy is given in after prayer, whether it comes as a gracious answer to it or no, is this, that the wicked themselves have many, and those the same temporal mercies issued out unto them by the hand of common providence without prayer, which he receives. Now, saith Satan, how knowest thou that thy mercies come to thee as an answer of thy prayer, and not at the door of common providence, with them? For the extricating thee out of this snare, thou must know, that we are not to expect extraordinary ways to determine this, but must satisfy ourselves with what light the word of God affords, which is able to resolve, not only this, but all our cases of conscience. It is true, that God doth sometimes cast in some such circumstances, as bring an evidence with them, that the mercy flies to us on the wings of prayer; as, when upon Abraham's servant praying at the well for God's gracious conduct and help to despatch his master's business prosperously, that Rebecca should presently come forth, and by her kind carriage and invitation so fitly answer the mould of his prayer; here God declared to his very sense that his prayer found the right way to heaven: when upon prayer the mercy is thus cast in strangely and suddenly without the concurrence of second causes, yea, when they all lie under a visible sentence of death, and the thing is put beyond the activity of their sphere to work. Thus, when the apostles healed the sick upon a short prayer darted up to heaven. When Peter knocked at the door where the church was praying for him, what but prayer bound his keeper's senses so fast in the chains of sleep, and made those with which Peter was bound to fall off without any hand to help but Heaven's? What made the iron gate so officious to open to him that had no key in his hand to unlock it? Surely we must confess prayer opened heaven's door, and Heaven, at the church's prayer, opened the prison door. Yet, it is as true, that more commonly mercies that are won by prayer, come not with this pomp and observation; but as converting grace often steals into the hearts of some with less terror and noise of humiliation than it doth in others; so, truly, do answers to prayer (and the more commonly) come with more silence, and in the ordinary road, by the concurring help of second causes. As the Christian praying for the temporal provisions of this life, God answers his prayer by blessing his diligence in his calling. The sick Christian praying, hath his food and physic thereby sanctified, and so recovers. Now, though God hath left himself at liberty, either to send his mercies by secondary hands, or when he pleaseth to be the messenger himself, and bring them in an extraordinary way; yet hath he not left us at liberty to leave the ordinary road, and neglect the means, under a pretence of expecting extraordinary ways to have our desires.

Now, as to this ordinary way of giving in mercies in answer to prayer: First, Inquire whether thou, who didst put up the prayer, be in a covenant state. When God gives a mercy in answer to prayer, he is said to remember his covenant, Psa. cv. 8; and to be mindful of his covenant, Psa. cxi. 5. His eye is first on the person, taking notice whether it is his child or no, then his ear is open to his cry, Psa. xxxiv. 15: 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.' 'Who art thou, my son?' said Isaac to Jacob, before he gave him the blessing. If God sees thou art not his child (and his eyes are not dim, like old Isaac's, that he can be deceived), thy prayer is not accepted. Indeed, neither canst thou in that state pray, in a

Digitized by Google

gospel sense, nor God graciously bid thy prayer welcome; for the spirit of prayer is a covenant grace, and interest in the mediation of Christ, a covenant privilege; without both which no prayer is accepted. God hears not any that have not his Spirit to pray in them, and his Son to pray for them; and none have these but such as are in a covenant state. Secondly, Inquire what thy frame of heart was in the duty of prayer, and also after its performance. Thy not being in a covenant state will prove thy prayer was not heard, and, consequently, that the mercy received came not as a gracious answer to it; but thy being in a covenant state is an insufficient ground for thee to conclude that this particular prayer that thou puttest up is accepted, because there may intervene something to hinder the present benefit of this privilege which is annexed to thy covenant state; for, though thy state be good, yet thy present frame and behaviour may be naught. Thou mayest, though a child of God, be under fresh guilt and defilement as yet unrepented of. Now, in this case, God can shut his door upon his own child. As a saint, thou hast a right to all the promises of the covenant; but as thou art a saint under guilt, or the defilement of any sin that thou hast not yet repented of, thou art not fit to enjoy what thou hast a right to as a saint. God doth not disinherit thee, indeed, but he sequestrates the promise from thee, and the rents of it shall not be paid to thee till thou renewest thy repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus, for the pardon of it. Thy God will choose a fitter time than this is to signify his love to thee. The leper, under the law, was to stand off till purified; and so will thy God turn his back on thy prayer till thou art cleansed of thy sin. Again, suppose thou art a saint, and hast not thus defiled thyself with any gross sin, yet thy graces might not be exercised in the duty of prayer; haply thou didst pray, but no faith or fervency were in it. There may be grace in the heart, but none in the duty; and such a prayer shall not speed; the promise is to the saint exercising his faith and fervency in prayer: 'The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James v. 16. 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart,' Jer. xxix. 13. Lastly, Though thou wert stirred up in prayer, yet, may be, thy heart was not raised up to rely on God after prayer for an answer. Then we pray in faith, when we so take hold of God by faith in prayer as to wait and stay ourselves upon God for a return of mercy from him Now, by all these together thou mayest resolve the question whether thou art in a covenant state, and liest not in any known sin unrepented of: if thou prayest fervently, through faith on God, so as to stay thy soul upon him for an answer, though accompanied with many weaknesses and staggerings, truly thou mayest without presumption conclude that the mercy which finds thee in this orderly manner waiting upon God, comes as a gracious answer to thy prayer. We do not fear to break open a letter when we find our name in the superscription directing it to us. Search the promises, and thou shalt find them directed by name to thee who prayest thus.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRST IMPORTANCE OF 'PRAYING ALWAYS' SHEWN TO AMOUNT TO AS MUCH AS PRAYING IN EVERYTHING; AND WHY ALL OUR AFFAIRS AND ACTIONS ARE TO BE ENCIRCLED WITHIN THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

HAVING despatched the duty of prayer in general, we now come to give an account of the several branches in the exhortation, which together make up an excellent directory to the Christian for his better performing of this duty. Indeed, the apostle here not only teacheth the Christian how to pray, but the minister also how to preach, in that he doth not nakedly tell them what is their duty, and so leave them to their own skill in the management of it; but that he may facilitate the duty, he annexeth such directions that they shall not easily miscarry in the performance thereof. That preacher who presseth a duty, though with never so much zeal, but doth not chalk out the way how it is to be done, is like one that brings a man to a door that is locked, and bids him go into the house, but gives him no key to open it; or, that sends a company to sea, but lends them no chart by which they should steer their course. But to come to the directions, which are six.

First, The time for this duty—*always*; and this hath a threefold importance:

Digitized by Google

To pray always, is as much as if he had said, *Pray in everything*, according to what the same apostle says in another epistle: 'In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' Prayer is a catholic duty, with which, like a girdle, we are to be encompassed in all our affairs: it is to be as bread and salt on our table; whatever else we have to our meal, these are not forgotten to be set on: whatever we do, or would have, prayer is necessary, be it small or great: not as the heathen, who prayed for some things to their gods, and not for others; if poor, they prayed for riches; if sick, for health; but as for the good things of the mind, such as patience, contentment, and other virtues, they thought they could carve well enough in these for themselves, without troubling their gods. O, how proud is ignorance! Let God give the less, and man will do the greater. But their folly is not so much to be wondered at as the irreligion of many among ourselves, who profess to know the true God, and have the light of his word to direct them what worship to give him. Some are so brutish in their knowledge that they hardly pray to God for anything, others not for everything. May be they look upon pardon of sin, and salvation of their souls, as fruit on the top branches of a tree, out of the reach of their own arm; and therefore now and then put up some slight prayers to God for them. But as for temporals, which seem to hang lower, they think they can pluck them by their own industry, without setting up the ladder of prayer to come at them. When we see how busy some are in laying their plots, and how seldom in prayer, we cannot but think that they expect their safety from their own policy, and not from God's providence; or when we observe how hard they work in their shop, and how seldom and lazy they are at prayer for God's blessing on their labour, in their closet, we must conclude that these men promise themselves their estates more from their own labour than the Divine bounty. In a word, it is some great occasion that must bring many upon their knees before God in prayer: may be, when they have an extraordinary enterprise in hand, wherein they look for strong opposition or great difficulty, in such a case God shall have them knocking at his door, for now they are at their wits' end, and know not what to do; but the more ordinary and common actions of their lives they think they can master at their pleasure, and so pass by God's door without bespeaking his presence or assistance: thus one runs into his shop, and another into the field, and takes no notice that God is concerned in their employments. If to take a long journey by sea or land, where imminent dangers and hazards present themselves unto their thoughts, then God hath their company; but if to stay at home or walk to and fro in their ordinary employments, they bespeak not the providential wing of God to overshadow them. This is not to *pray always*. If thou wilt, therefore, be a Christian, do not thus conduct thyself towards God, committing the greater transactions of thy life to him, and trusting thyself with the less, but 'acknowledge God in all thy ways, and lean not to thine own understanding in any.' By this thou shalt give him the glory of his universal providence, with which he encircles all his creatures and all their actions; as nothing is too great to be above his power, so nothing too little to be beneath his care: he is the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains. The sparrow on the hedge, and the hair on our head, are cared for by him; and this is no more derogatory to his glorious majesty than it was to make them at first. Nay, thou shalt by this not only give God his glory, but secure thyself; for there is no passage in thy whole life so minute and inconsiderable which (if God should withdraw his care and providence) might not be an occasion of a sin or a danger to thee; and that which exposeth thee to these, calls upon thee to engage God for thy defence. First, The least passage in thy life may prove an occasion of sin to thee: at what a little wicket many times a great sin enters! David's eye did but casually light on Bathsheba, and the good man's foot was presently in the devil's trap: hast thou not then need to pray that God would set a guard about thy senses wherever thou goest, and to cry with him, 'Keep back mine eyes from beholding vanity?' Dinah went but to give her neighbours, the daughters of the land, a visit, and we may imagine that she little thought, when she went out, of playing the strumpet before she came home; yet, alas! we read how she was deflowered. What need, then, hast thou, before thou goest forth, to charge God with the keeping of thee, that so thou mayest be in his fear from

Digitized by Google

morning till night? Secondly, no passage of thy life is so small wherein thou mayest not fall into some great danger. How many have been choked with their food at their own table,—received their deadly wound by a beam from their own house! Knowest thou what will be the end of any action when thou beginnest it? Joseph was sent by his father to see his brethren in the field, and neither of them thought of a longer journey; yet this proved the sad occasion of his captivity in a strange land. Job's servants were destroyed with lightning from heaven when they were abroad about their master's business. Where canst thou be safe if Heaven's eye be not on thee? A slip of thy foot as thou walkest, or a trip of thy horse as thou ridest, may break thy bones. O, what need then of a God to make thy path plain before thee! Is it he that preserves man and beast? And canst thou have faith to expect his protection, when thou hast not a heart to bespeak it in thy humble prayers at his hand? What reason hath God to take care for thy safety, who carest not for his honour?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SECOND IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING IN ALL CONDITIONS; AND WHY THIS DUTY IS SO TO BE PERFORMED.

To pray always, may import as much, as to pray in all conditions; that is, in prosperity, as well as in adversity. Indeed, when God afflicts, he puts an especial season for prayer into our hands; but when he enlargeth our state he doth not discharge us of the duty, as if we might then lay it aside, as the traveller doth his cloak when the weather is warm. Prayer is not a winter garment: it is then to be worn indeed, but not to be left off in the summer of prosperity. If you would find some at prayer, you must stay till it thunders and lightens; and not go to them except it be in a storm. These are like some birds that are never heard to cry or make a noise but in or against foul weather. This is not to pray always; not to serve God, but to serve ourselves; to visit God, not as a friend, for love of his company, but as a mere beggar for relief of our present necessity; using prayer as that pope is said to have used preaching, for a net to procure some mercy we want, and when the fish is got, then to throw away the duty. Well, Christian, take heed of this; thou hast arguments enough to keep this duty always on its wheels, let thy condition be what it will. First, Pray in prosperity, that thou mayest speed when thou prayest in adversity; own God now, that he may acknowledge thee then. Shall that friend be welcome to us, who never gives us a visit but when he comes to borrow? This is acting the part of a beggar, not a friend. Secondly, Pray in prosperity, to prove that thou didst not pray in hypocrisy when thou wert afflicted. One prayer now, will be a better evidence for thy sincerity, than a whole bundle of duties performed in adversity. Colours are better distinguished by day-light, than by candle-light. I am sure the truth and plainness of our hearts in duty will be best discovered in prosperity. In affliction, even gracious souls have scruples upon their spirits, which they seek themselves; pain, they fear, makes them cry till they remember that their acquaintance with God did not begin in their affliction, but that they took delight in his company before these straits drove them to him. Thirdly, Pray in prosperity, that thou mayest not be ensnared by it. Ephraim and Manasses were brethren; and so are *plenty* and *forgetfulness*, the signification of their name. Prosperity is no friend to the memory, therefore we are cautioned so much to beware when we are full, lest we forget God. He is a holy man, indeed, whose present prosperity doth not prove a snare to him, when it smiles most pleasingly on him. O, how hard it is to be pleased with it, and not be ensnared by it! 'Strong drink,' Solomon saith, 'is a mocker;' it soon puts him that is too bold with it, to shame;—prosperity doth the same. A little of it makes us drunk, and then we know not what to do. This hath often proved an hour of temptation to the best of men. You shall find, in Scripture, that the saints have had their saddest falls on the most even ground. Noah, who had seen the whole world drowned in water, no sooner was safe on shore, but himself is drowned in wine. David's heart was fixed when in the wilderness, but his wanton eye rolled and wandered when he walked upon the terrace of his palace. Health, honour, riches, and pleasures, with the rest of this world's

Digitized by Google

enjoyments, are like luscious wine: we cannot drink little of them, they are so sweet to our carnal palate; and we cannot bear much of them, because they are strong and heady, fuming up in pride and carnal confidence. Now prayer is an excellent preservative against the evil of this state. First, As it spiritualizes our joy into thankfulness. It is carnal joy that is dreggy, and therefore soon putrefies. Now, as prayer in affliction refines the Christian's sorrow by breathing it forth in holy groans to God, whereby he is kept from sinful complaints and murmurings against him; so here the Christian, by giving a spiritual vent to his joy in thanksgiving and praises of his God, is preserved from the degeneracy of carnal joy, that betrays the soul to many foul sins, if itself be not one: for which purpose it is, that the apostle James cuts out this twofold channel for this double affection to run in:—'Is any afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms,' James v. 13. As if he should say, Let the afflicted soul pray, that it may not murmur: let the joyous saint sing psalms, that his joy turn not sensual. A carnal heart can easily be merry when he prospers; the saint alone is praiseful. The psalmist, speaking of the mariners delivered from storms at sea, saith, 'Then are they glad, because they be quiet,' Psa. cvii. 30: but this they may be, and yet not thankful: wherefore he adds, 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!' Secondly, By prayer the soul is led into the acquaintance of higher delights than are to be found in all temporal enjoyments, and thereby is taken off from an inordinate valuation of them, because he knows where better are to be had. The true reason why men are puffed up with too high an opinion of worldly felicities, is their ignorance of spiritual. Thirdly, Prayer is God's ordinance to sanctify our creature-comforts. Everything is 'sanctified by the word of God and prayer,' 1 Tim. iv. 5. Now, this obtained, the Christian may safely drink of these streams; the unicorn hath now put in his horn to heal them; Satan shall not have such power to corrupt him in the use of them, as another that bespeaks not God's blessing on them. There is a flatulency in every creature, which, if not corrected by prayer, breeds indigested humours in him that feeds on it. Fourthly, In thy prosperity pray, to shew thy dependence on God for what thou enjoyest. Thou holdest all thy mercies *in capite*. He that gave thee life, holds thy soul in life: 'Thou didst hide thy face,' saith David, 'and I was troubled.' Truly it is time for God to withdraw his hand when thou goest about to cut off his title. That enjoyment comes but as a guest, which is not entertained by prayer. Solomon tells us of wings that our temporal mercies have: now, if anything can clip these, and keep them from flying away, it is prayer. God would often have destroyed Israel, had not Moses stood in the gap; their mercies were often upon the wing, but that holy man's prayers stayed their flight. God's heart would not allow him to refuse his prayer, and put that to shame; no, they shall live, but let them say, Moses's prayer begged their life. Now, if the prayer of a holy person could prevail for others, and obtain a new lease for their lives, who were (many of them) none of the best; surely, then, the prayer of a saint may have great power with God for his own. Long life is promised to him that honours his earthly father: prayer gives our heavenly Father the greatest honour. If, therefore, thou wouldst have thy life, or the life of any mercy prolonged, forget not to pay him this tribute. Yea, would you transmit what God hath blessed you with to your posterity? The best way thou canst take is, to lock thy estate up in God's hand by prayer. Whatever *will* thou makest, God is sure to be thy executor. Man may propose and purpose, but God disposeth. Engage him, and the care is taken for thy posterity. Fifthly, Pray now that thou mayest outlive the loss of thy prosperity When prayer cannot prevail to keep a temporal mercy alive, yet it will have a powerful influence to keep thy heart alive when that dies. O, it is sad, when a man's estate and comfort are buried in the same grave together. None will bear the loss of an enjoyment so patiently, as he that was exercised in prayer while he had it. When Job was in his flourishing estate, his children alive, and all his other enjoyments, then was he a great trader with God in this duty;—he sanctified his children every day. He did not bless himself in them, but sought the blessing of God for them. And see how comfortably he bears all; 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' The more David prayed for his child while alive, the fewer tears he shed for it when dead.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE THIRD IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING ALWAYS TO BE AS MUCH AS PRAYING DAILY; AND WHY WE ARE TO PRAY DAILY.

To pray always, is to pray daily. When the Christian keeps a constant, daily exercise of this duty, prayer is not a holy-day, but every-day work: 'Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thee for ever and ever. This was typified by the daily sacrifice, called, therefore, 'the continual burnt-offering,' Exod. xxix. 38, whereby was signified our daily need of seeking mercy at God's hands through Christ. When our Lord taught his disciples to pray, he bade them not ask bread for a week, no, nor for the morrow, but for the present day,—'Give us this day our daily bread:' plainly signifying our duty to seek our bread every day of God; which surely was also the reason why God gave the manna in such a portion, as should not fill their cupboards, and furnish them with a store for a month or a week, but be a just and sufficient allowance for a day; that so they might be kept in a daily dependence on God, and look up to him daily, who carried the key of their pantry for them. And have not we the same necessities with them? Our bodies are as weak as theirs, and cannot be preserved without daily repast. Do we not depend on him for the bread of the day, and the rest of the night? And he hath too good an opinion of his soul's constitution, who thinks he can live or thrive with yesterday's meal, without communion with God to-day. The mother would think the sucking child not well, if it should forsake the breast a whole day; so mayest thou conclude thy soul is not right, if it can pass a day without craving any spiritual repast in prayer. If thy wants be not sufficient to keep the chariots of this duty on its wheels, yet the sins which thou daily renewest should drive thee every day to confess and beg pardon for them. We are under a law, not to let the sun go down upon our wrath against our brother; and dare we, who every day deserve God's wrath, let the sun go down before a reconciliation is effected between God and us? In a word, every day hath its new mercies: 'His compassions fail not; they are new every morning,' Lam. iii. 22, 23. These new mercies contract a new debt, and God hath told us the way of payment, namely, a tribute of praise: without this we cannot expect a sanctified use of them. He is branded by all for a profane person that eats his meat, and gives not thanks; and it would be thought a ridiculous excuse should he say he gave thanks yesterday, and that should serve for this also. We have more mercies every day to bless God for than what is set on our tables. We wear mercies, we breath mercies, we walk upon mercies, our whole life is but a passage from one mercy to another. Now, doth God every day anoint our head with fresh oil, and shall we not crown him with new praises? I will not enter into a discourse how often a Christian should pray in a day: at least it must be twice, that is, morning and night. Prayer must be the key of the morning, and lock of the night. We shew not ourselves Christians, if we do not open our eyes with prayer when we rise, and shut them again with the same key when we lie down at night. This answers to the morning and evening sacrifice in the law, which was so commanded, as to leave room for those other free-will offerings which their zeal might prompt them to. Pray as often as you please besides, so that your devotions interefere not with the necessary duties of your particular callings; the oftener, the more welcome. We read of David's seven times a day; but be sure thou dost not retrench and cut God short of thy stated hours. 'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord;—to shew forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,' Psa. xcii. 1, 2. God is Alpha and Omega. It is fit we should begin and end the day with his praise, who begins and ends it for us with mercy. Well, thou seest thy duty plainly laid before thee. As thou wouldst have God prosper thy labour in the day, and sweeten thy rest in the night, clasp them both together with thy morning and evening devotions. He that takes no care to set forth God's portion of time in the morning, doth not only rob God of his due, but is a thief to himself all the day after, by losing the blessing which a faithful prayer might bring from heaven on his undertakings. And he that closeth his eyes at night without prayer, lies down before his bed is made. God is his people's keeper: but can he expect to be kept by him, that chargeth not the Divine Providence with his

Digitized by Google

keeping? The angels, at his command, pitch their tents about his saints' dwellings. But as the drum calls the watch together, so God looks that, by humble prayer, we should beg of him their ministry and attendance about us.

Caution.—Beware, that thy constant daily performance of this duty doth not degenerate into a lifeless formality. What we do commonly, we are prone to do but slightly. He is a rare Christian that keeps his course in prayer, and yet grows not to pray of mere course. The power of religion cannot be preserved without an outward form and order observed in its exercises; and yet very hard it is not to grow formal in those duties which we are daily conversant with. Many that are very neat and nice when their holiday suit is on, are yet too slovenly in wearing their every-day apparel. Thus at a fast, or on a sabbath, our hearts haply are stirred up to some solemnity and spirituality becoming the duty of prayer, as being awed with the sacredness of the time, and extraordinary weight of the work: but, alas! in our every-day duties we are too slovenly. Now set thyself, Christian, with all thy might, to keep up the life and vigour of thy spirit in thy daily approaches to God. Labour to come as hungry to this duty, as to eat thy dinner. Now, there is no expedient for this, like a holy watch set about thy heart in the whole course of thy life. He that watcheth his heart all day, is most likely to find it in tune for prayer at night; whereas loose walking breeds lazy praying. Be often in the day putting thyself in mind what work waits for thee at night. Thou art to draw near unto thy God: and this will make thee afraid of doing anything in the day that will indispose thee or make thee fear a chide from thy God when thou appearest before him, 1 Pet. i. 17: 'If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.' As if he had said, Do you mean to pray? Then look to the whole course of your walking, that it be in the fear of God, or else you will have little heart to go about that work, and as little hope that he will bid you welcome: for he judgeth of persons that pray, not only by their prayers, but by their works and walking.

CHAPTER XXX.

OF EJACULATORY PRAYER, ITS NATURE, USE, AND END.

The second branch in the apostle's directory for prayer hath respect to the kinds of prayer that are to be taken into the Christian's exercise: as for the season, he must pray always; so for the kinds of prayer, with all prayer and supplication. Now there is a double 'all' to be observed. First, 'all manner' of prayer; secondly, 'all matter of prayer.' I shall begin with the first, and that falls under several divisions. First, Ejaculatory, which is nothing but the lifting up of the soul to God upon a sudden emergent occasion, with some short but lively expression of our desires to him: sometimes it is vocal, sometimes only groaned forth from the secret workings of a gracious heart. These darts may be shot to heaven without using the tongue's bow. Such a kind of prayer that of Moses was, which rang so loud in God's ear, that he asked him, 'Wherefore criest thou unto me?' Exod. xiv. 15; whereas we do not read of a word that he spake. It was no season for Moses then to retire and betake himself to the duty of prayer, in a composed and settled way, as at other times he was wont, for the enemy was at his back, and the people of Israel flocking about him murmuring, and charging him with the guilt of blood, in that he had enticed them out of Egypt, to fall into such a trap, wherein they expected no other than to lose their lives, either in the sea, or by the Egyptians. This, no doubt, made Moses despatch his desires to heaven by some short ejaculation, the surest and quickest post in the world, which brought him back a speedy and happy return, ver. 16. Thus Nehemiah, also, upon the occasion of the king's speech to him, interposeth a short prayer to God between the king's question and his answer to it: 'Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king,' &c., chap. ii. 4, 5. So soon was this holy man at heaven and back again, without any breach of manners in making the king wait for his answer. Sometimes you have the saints forming their desires into a few smart and passionate words, which fly with a holy force from their lips to heaven. Thus old Jacob, when he

Digitized by Google

was despatching his sons back again to Egypt, and with the greatest prudence provided for their journey (by furnishing them with double money, and a choice present in their hand to appease the governor of the land), that he might engage Heaven on their side, he breathes forth this ejaculatory prayer, 'God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin!' Gen. xliii. 14. And David, when intelligence came that Ahithophel was of Absalom's counsel, let fly that dart to heaven, which came down upon his head with a vengeance, 'O Lord, I pray thee turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,' 2 Sam. xv. 31. This kind of praying David probably might mean, Psa. cxix. 164, when he saith, 'Seven times a-day do I praise thee;' not as if he had seven set hours for this duty every day, as the Papists would have it, to countenance their seven canonical hours, but rather a definite number is put for an indefinite, and so amounts to this,—he did very often in a day praise God, his holy heart taking the hint of every providence to carry him to heaven on this errand of prayer and praise.

Now, to despatch this kind of prayer, I shall, First, Shew why the Christian besides his stated hours for prayer, wherein he holds more solemn commerce with God, should also visit God occasionally, and step into his presence, whatever he is about, with these ejaculatory breathings of his heart; for this is a kind of prayer that needs not interrupt the Christian in his other employments. Is he on a journey? he may go to heaven in these short sallies of his soul, and make no less way for them. Is he in the field at work? his plough needs not stand still for this. As the meadow is not the worse for what the bee sucks from its flowers, so neither do a man's worldly occasions suffer from the spiritual improvement which a gracious soul thus makes of them.

Section I.—The first reason may be taken from God, who, to shew his great delight in his children's prayers, lets his door stand always wide open, that whenever we may have but a heart to step in to visit him with a prayer, we shall be welcome: nay, he doth not only give us liberty, but lays it as a law upon us, to let him hear from us as often as possible, and therefore commands us to 'pray without ceasing,' 1 Thess. v. 17; and, whatever we do, in word or deed, to do all in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father by him. What do the such-like places signify but that we should take every occasion that his Spirit and providence bring to our hand for the lifting our hearts up to him in prayer. And can we suppose that a prayer at our first setting forth in the morning, with never thinking of God any more till we come to our round for prayer at night again, will pass for a praying continually? When a father chargeth his son that lives abroad to let him hear from him as often as possible, though he doth not expect a long epistle from him by every messenger that comes that way, yet he looks for some short remembrance of his duty by word of mouth, and it is accepted till he hath more leisure to write his full mind. God bids us pray continually: now, he knows we cannot be always on our knees in the solemn performance of this duty; therefore he expects to hear the oftener from us in these occasional remembrances of him, (hinted to us all the day by emerging providences,) which the Holy Spirit stands ready to convey unto him.

Section II.—From the excellent use of ejaculatory prayer in the Christian's whole course of life. First, They are of excellent use to be set against those sudden injections of Satan which he will be darting into our minds. It were strange if the best of saints should not find the devil busy with them in this prayer: there are none whose chastity of mind this foul spirit dares not assault; and when his temptations have once coloured our imagination, it is difficult to wipe them off before they soak so deep as to leave some malignant tincture on our affections. Now, when any such dart from hell is shot in at thy window, the best way to overcome the temptation is to shoot thy darts to heaven in some holy ejaculation. Our Saviour taught his disciples to use this weapon, 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Now, when thou canst not draw out the long sword of solemn prayer, then go to the short dagger of ejaculatory prayer; and with this in the hand of faith thou mayest stab thy enemy to the heart. He that at one short prayer could infatuate Ahithophel, an oracle for policy, can befool the devil himself, and will at thy prayer of faith. 'The Lord rebuke thee, Satan,' said Christ. It is time for Satan to be gone

Digitized by Google

when heaven takes the alarm; as when thieves are about a house to rob it, and they within give a sudden shriek to call in help, presently they flee; and if God, for thy trial, should not come at first call to rid thee of these unwelcome guests, yet thy very crying out will prevent thy consenting to their villany. Secondly, They are a soverign means to allay the Christian's affections to the world, one of the worst enemies he hath in the field against him, for it chokes the soul, thickens the Christian's spirit, and changes his very complexion. Who but dying men smell of the earth, and carry its colour in their countenance? Grace dieth apace where the heart savours much of the earth. Now, prayer, what is it but the lifting of the soul from earth to heaven? Were we oftener in a day drawing in new influences of grace from God, our spirits could not possibly be so poisoned with worldly affections. When one was asked whether he did not admire the goodly structure of a stately house, he answered, No: for, saith he, I have been at Rome, where more magnificent fabrics are to be seen. Thus, when Satan presents the world's pleasures or treasures to the Christian, that he may enveigle his affections to dote on them, a gracious soul can say, I have been at heaven; there is not an hour in the day I enjoy better than these in communion with my God.

SECTION III.—They keep a Christian's heart in a holy disposition for the more solemn performance of this duty. He that is so heavenly in his earthly employments, will be the less worldly in his heavenly. It was a sweet speech of a dying saint, that he was going to change his place, but not his company. A Christian that is frequent in these ejaculations, when he goes to pray more solemnly, he goes not from the world to God, but from God to God; from a transient view of him to a more fixed; whereas another discontinues his acquaintance with God after his morning visit, and comes not in his company till called in by his customary performance. O how hard a business will such an one find it to pray with a heavenly heart! What you fill the vessel with you must expect to draw thence: if water be put in, we cannot, without a miracle, think to draw wine. What! art thou all day filling thy heart with earth, (God being not in all thy thoughts,) and dost thou look to draw heaven thence at night? If you will have fire for your evening sacrifice, expect not new fire to be dropped from heaven, but labour to keep what is already on thy altar from going out, which thou canst not better do than by feeding it with this fuel.

SECTION IV.—They are of excellent use to alleviate any great affliction that lies upon the soul or body. While others sit disconsolate, grinding their souls, and wasting their spirits with their own anxious thoughts, these are his wings with which he flieth above his troubles, and in an instant shoots his soul to heaven, out of the din of his afflictions. How can he be long uncomfortable, who, when anything begins to disquiet him, lets it not lie troubling his mind, as a thorn in the flesh, but presently gives vent to it, by some heavenly meditation, or heart-easing prayer to God? Those heavy tidings which came to Job one upon another, it was not possible for him to have stood under, had his thoughts been employed on no other subject than his affliction; but being able to lift up his heart to God,—'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,'—this one ejaculation gave him ease. Indeed, in afflictions that are very violent, it is no time for long discourses; the poor creature cannot hold out in a continued duty of prayer, as at another time. When the fight grows hot, and the army comes to grapple hand to hand with their enemy, they have not leisure to charge their great artillery, then their short swords do them most service. So in this case; the poor creature, may be, finds his body weak, and his spirit oppressed with temptations, which Satan pours like so much shot upon him, that all he can well do is to pray quick and short: now fetch a groan for the pain he feels, and then shoot a dart to heaven, to call God to his help. And blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of these arrows. We see Christ, in his agony, choose to pray often, rather than long,—'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: however, not my will, but thine, be done.' This short ejaculation he sends to heaven thrice, with some little pause of time between prayer and prayer; 'and was heard in that he feared,' Heb. v. 7.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXI.

A REPROOF TO THOSE THAT USE NOT THIS KIND OF PRAYER, OR DO IT IN A PROFANE MANNER; OR USE IT, BUT NEGLECT OTHER.

SECTION I.—For reproof of those that are wholly unacquainted with this kind of praying. Their heart is a bow bent indeed, and their quiver full of arrows, but all are shot beside this mark: the world is their butt, at this they let fly all their thoughts, God is so great a stranger with them, that they hardly speak to or think of him from morning to night, though they travel all day in his company: and is it not strange that God, who is so near his creature, should be so far from his thoughts? Where canst thou be, or what can thy eye light upon, that may not bring God to thy remembrance, and give thee an occasion to lift up thy heart to him? He is present with thee in every place and company; thou canst use no creature, enjoy no mercy, feel no affliction, and put thy hand to no work, which will not prompt thee either to beg his counsel, seek his blessing, crave his protection, or give him praise for his gracious providence over thee. The very beast thou ridest on, could it speak (as once Balaam's ass did), would reprove thy atheism, who goest plodding on thy way, and takest no notice of him that preserveth both man and beast. But God speaks once, yea, twice, and brutish men perceive it not. Well may Solomon say, 'The heart of the wicked is little worth,' when 'God is not in all his thoughts.' What can that heart be worth, that is stuffed with that which is worth nought, at least which, within a while, will be so; for, in that moment wherein these poor wretches die, all their thoughts perish, and come to nothing. Truly, though ye were so many kings, yet, if the stock of your thoughts be spent all the day long upon earthly projects (never flying so high as to lead you into communion with God), you are but like those vermin, that are buried alive in some stinking dunghill: the food your souls live upon is low and base, and such must the temper of your souls needs be. Oh, how many are there in the world, who devote their whole attention to the body, to the neglect of the soul! The body, which is the beggar, is mounted on horseback; and the soul, which is the prince, walks on foot, preferred to no higher employment, than to hold her slave's stirrup, being made to bestow all its thoughts and cares how to provide for that, and allowed nothing for itself. Yet these are cried up for the only happy men in the world; whereas, some poor creatures are to be found (though their outward garb in the world renders them despicable) who enjoy more of heaven and true comfort, by the frequent commerce they have with God, in one day than the others do in all their lives, for all their pomp. What account will such give to God for the expense of their thoughts, the first-born of their souls? What pity is it, that strangers should devour them; the highest improvement whereof is to send them in embassies to heaven, and to converse with God! He who gave man a countenance erect, to walk (not creep, as some other creatures, with their back towards heaven, and their mouth to the earth), never intended his soul should stoop so below itself, and lick the dust for its food; but rather, that it should look up to God, and enjoy herself in enjoying communion with him, who is the Father of spirits. If it be so sad a spectacle, to behold a man bowed down through the deformities or infirmities of his body, as to go like a beast on all four; much more, to see a soul so crippled with sensual affections, that it cannot look up from the earth where it lies, to converse with God its Maker.

SECTION II.—It reproves those who do, indeed, shoot now and then to heaven some of these darts of ejaculatory prayers; but in so profane a way, as makes both God and gracious men to nauseate them. Did you never hear a vile wretch load his discourse with a strange medley of oaths and prayers?—make use of an oath, and send out a vain prayer in the midst of his carnal discourse? *God forgive us; God bless us; God be merciful to us;*—such forms of speech many have got, and they come out when they do not mind what they say. Now, which do you think is likely first to get to heaven, their oaths or their prayers. It is hard to say whether their swearing or their praying be the worst. What base and low thoughts have these wretches of the great God, to make so bold with his holy and reverend name, which should not be thought

Digitized by Google

or spoken of without fear and trembling! The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools; that is, it is uncomely. The name of God doth not fit a profane mouth; the discourse is not proper. One step in hell and another in heaven, is too great a stride at once to be taken. To shoot one dart at God in an oath, and another to him in a prayer, what can you make of this but sporting with that which is sacred? Religion and the eye are too tender to be played with. Such prayers as these are shot out of the devil's bow, and are never likely to reach heaven, except to bring a curse to him that sent them up.

SECTION III.—A reproof to those who content themselves with this kind of prayer. They will now and then cast a transient glance upon God in a short ejaculation; but never set themselves to seek God in a more solemn way. And is this all thou canst afford? No more but to look in at God's door, and away presently. Dost thou not think that he expects thou shouldst sometimes come to stay longer with him, in a more settled communion? It is true, these occasional visits when joined with the due performance of the other, is an excellent symptom of a heavenly heart, and speaks grace to be very lively where they are frequent: as when a man between his meals is so hungry, that he must have something to stay his stomach, and yet when dinner comes, can feed as heartily as if he had eaten nothing; this shews the man to be healthy; but if a bit, by the by, takes away his stomach, that he can eat little or nothing at his ordinary meals, this is not so good a sign. Thus here, if a Christian, between his set and solemn seeking of God morning and night, finds an inward hunger upon his spirit so strongly craving communion with God, that he cannot stay till his stated hour for prayer returns, but ever and anon be refreshing himself with the beverage of ejaculatory prayer, and then comes sharp set to duty at his ordinary set time; this speaks grace to be strong; but, on the contrary, it shews a slighty spirit to make these a plea for the neglect of the other. Thou surely tastest little sweetness, and findest little nourishment from these, or else they would excite thy soul to hunger for farther communion with God. As soon as David opened his eyes in the morning, his heart was sallying forth to God,—'When I awake, I am still with thee:' and as he walked abroad in the daytime, every occasion led him to God. 'Seven times a day do I praise thee, that is, often: but did these short glances of David's heart steal from the more solemn performance of this duty? No; we find he had his set seasons also: 'Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud,' Psa. lv. 17. Mr. Ainsworth interprets this of solemn, stated prayer: and it seems to have been the practice of the more devout Jews, to devote three seasons in a day for that duty. I can no more believe him to be frequent and spiritual in ejaculatory prayer, who neglects the season of solemn prayer, than I can believe, that he keeps every day in the week a Sabbath, who neglects to keep that one which God hath appointed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE FREQUENT USE OF EJACULATORY PRAYER, WITH TWO OR THREE HELPS THEREUNTO.

To the saints. Be ye excited to the frequent exercise of this duty. I know you are not altogether strangers to it, if you answer your name; but it is a more familiar acquaintance with this kind of prayer that I would gladly lead you into; such an art it is, that were we but skillful traders in it, we should find a blessed advance in our spiritual estate, and soon have more money in our purse (grace and comfort I mean, in our hearts,) than now most Christians can shew; we might, by a spiritual alchemy, turn all we touch into gold, extract heaven out of earth, and make wings out of every creature and providence that meets us, to help us in our flight to God. Our whole life would be (what I have read of a holy man) but one communion-day with Christ. Then neither friends nor foes, joys nor woes, callings nor recreations, should be able to interrupt our acquaintance with him. Whereas, now, alas! everything interposeth, as an opaque body, to hide God and heaven from our eye. We, who now walk like travellers in some low swamp, with our thoughts so engrossed by the world, that we hardly get a sight of that glorious city, to which we are

Digitized by Google

going, from morning to night, and thereby lose much of the pleasure of our journey, should then have it in a manner always before us, as a joyful prospect in our eye to solace us in the difficulties of our pilgrimage, and make us gather up our feet more nimbly in the ways of holiness, when we shall see whither they lead us. We count them pleasantly situated, who live in a climate where the sun is seldom off their horizon. Truly, none have such a constant light of inward joy and peace shining upon their souls, as those who are familiarly conversant with this duty! they stand at the best advantage of any other to have, if not a continual, yet a frequent intercourse with God, from whom both the influences of comfort and grace do all come. And if those trees must needs have the fairest and sweetest fruit which stand most in the sun, then surely they are most likely to excel others, both in comfort and grace, who are most with God. Every little that the bee brings to the hive adds to the stock. Though the soul makes no long stay with God in this kind of prayer, yet the frequent reiterations thereof conduce much to the increase of its grace. Little gain, with quick returns, make a heavy purse. Little showers, often following one upon another, plump the corn. So do those short sallies of the soul to heaven enrich and increase grace in the heart exceedingly. Now, if thou shouldst ask, how thou mayest make this kind of ejaculatory prayer more familiar unto thee:

First, Keep thy heart with all diligence,—thy affections, I mean. The very reason why we sally out so seldom toward God in these occasional prayers, is, because the weight of our affections poise us another way. If our affections be carnal, to earth we go, and God hath little of our company. Adam, it is said, 'begat a son in his own likeness,' Gen. v. 3, and so doth the heart of every man. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. Labour, therefore, to keep thy heart heavenly; especially look to these three affections:—First, Thy love. If this fire burn clear, the more of these sparks will, from it, mount up to God. Love is a great friend to memory. The adulterer is said to have his eyes full of the harlot; and holy love will be as mindful of God. Such a soul will be often setting God in its view; 'I have set the Lord always before me,' Psa. xvi. 8. And by often thinking of God, the heart will be enticed into desires after him,' Isa. xxvi. 8: 'The desire of our soul is to thy name; and to the remembrance of thee;' and see what follows, ver. 9: 'With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.' Love sets the soul on musing, and from musing to praying. Meditation is prayer in bullion, prayer in the ore,—soon melted and run into holy desires. The laden cloud soon drops into rain; the piece charged soon goes off when fire is put to it. A meditating soul is in *proxima potentia* to prayer. 'While I was musing, the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end,' Psa. xxxix. 3, 4. This was an ejaculatory prayer shot from his soul, when in the company of the wicked. Secondly, Thy fear. Even wicked men, though they be great strangers to prayer, yet we shall hear them knocking at God's door in a fright; much more will a holy fear direct the Christian, upon all occasions, to lift up his heart to God. Art thou in thy calling? Fear a snare therein, and this will excite thee often in a day to ask counsel of God. Art thou in company? Fear lest thou shouldst do, or receive hurt, and thou wilt be lifting up thy heart to him that can only keep thee from both. We cannot have a more faithful monitor to remind us of this duty than holy fear. 'They that feared the Lord thought upon his name,' Mal. iii. 16. 'At what time I am afraid,' saith David, 'I will trust in thee.' Fear makes us think where our safety lies, and leads us to our refuge. Had not Noah feared a storm, the ark had not been built. Men fear no sin nor danger, and therefore God hears not of them all the day long. The ungodly, who walk with their back upon heaven, and look not up to God from morning to night,—'The fear of God is not before their eyes.' Thirdly, Thy joy and delight in God. O, cherish this! As fear disposeth to pray, so joy to praise. Now, and not till now, the instrument of thy heart is in tune. One hint now from the providence of God, and touch from his spirit, will set such on work to bless God. Carnal men, when they are frolicsome, have their catches and songs. How much more will the gracious soul, that walks in the sense of God's love, be often striking up his harp in holy praises to God! Psa. lxiii. 3, 'Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee;' ver. 4, 'I will bless thee while I live;'

Digitized by Google

and again, ver. 5, 'My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.' See how he goes over and over the same note. Joy can no more be hid than ointment; as that betrayeth itself by its sweet perfumes, so doth holy joy make its own report in the praises it sounds forth to God. It behoves thee, therefore, to be as choice of thy joy, as thou wouldst be of the blood in thy veins, for in this runs the spirit of praise and thanksgiving. Now, would you nourish your joy? Do it by sucking the promises, those breasts of consolation. These are food of pure juice, and strong nourishment; they soon turn into joy and peace, and with this a spirit of praise must grow also.

Secondly, Possess thy heart with strong apprehensions of God's overruling providence in all thy enterprises; that he doth what pleaseth him in heaven and earth, so that all thy labour and toil in any business is in vain, till this main wheel begins to stir; his providence gives countenance to the action. O, how would this raise thy heart up to God, and send thee with many an errand into his presence! Suppose a man was going about some important business, and had him in his company that alone could help or hinder the despatch of it; were it not strange that he should travel all day with him, and not apply himself to this person to make him his friend? This is thy case: thou and all thy affairs are at the absolute disposal of the great God, to bless or blast thee in every enterprise. Now, God is always in thy company, at home and abroad. Surely, didst thou believe this firmly, thou wouldst often in a day turn thyself to him, and beg his good-will to favour thy undertaking.

Thirdly, Look thou attend the motions of the Holy Spirit. The Christian shall find him, as his remembrancer, to remind him of the more solemn performance of this duty of prayer, so his monitor to suggest many occasional meditations to his thoughts, as a hint, that now it is a fit time to give God a visit in some holy ejaculation (by thus setting the door, as it were, open for him in God's presence;) sometimes he will be recalling a truth thou hast heard or read, a mercy thou hast received, or a sin thou hast committed; and what means he by all these, but to do thee a friendly office, thy affections being stirred, so that thou mayest be invited to dart thy soul up to God in some ejaculation. Now, take the hint he gives, and thou shalt have more of his company and help in this kind: for as the evil spirit, where he finds welcome to his wicked suggestions, grows bold to knock oftener at that door, because it is so soon opened to him; so the Holy Spirit is invited, where his motions are kindly entertained, to be more frequent in his kind approaches; whereas thy neglect of them may cause him to withdraw, and leave thee to thy own slothful spirit. When Christ had thrice made an attempt to awake his drowsy disciples, by calling them up to watch and pray, and they fell to nodding again, truly then he bids them sleep on.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SECRET PRAYER IS A DUTY INCUMBENT ON US, AND WHY.

THE second kind of prayer is that which we called composed, because the Christian composeth himself more solemnly to the work, by setting some considerable time apart from his other occasions, for his more free and full communion with God in prayer. Now this is either secret, or performed jointly with others. We begin with secret prayer; when the Christian retireth into some secret place, free from all company, and there pours out his soul into the bosom of God, none being witness to this trade which he carries on with heaven but God and himself.

SECTION I.—That it is the Christian's duty, secretly and solitarily to hold intercourse with God in prayer, I believe will be granted by more than practise it; even those that are strangers to the performance thereof, carry in their own bosom that which will accuse them of their neglect, except, by long looking on the light, and rebelling against the same, their foolish minds be darkened, and have lost all sight and sense of a Deity. If any prayer be a duty, then secret prayer must needs be one. This is to all the other, as the keel is to the ship, it bears up all the rest. If we look into the practice of Scripture saints, we shall find them all to have been great dealers with God in this trade of secret prayer: Abraham had his grove whither he retired 'to call upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God,' Gen. xxi. 33. We meet Isaac walking out into the field,

Digitized by Google

to seek some secret place, where he might more freely, with deep meditation, compose himself for this work, Gen. xxiv. 63. Neither was Rebekah a stranger to this duty, who, upon the babes' struggling in her womb, went to inquire of the Lord, Gen. xxv. 22; which, saith Calvin, was to pray in secret. Jacob is famous for his wrestling, as it were, hand to hand with God in the night Holy David's life was little else,—he gave himself to prayer, Psa. cix. 4: allow but some time to be spent by him for nature's refection, and the necessary occasions of his public employment, and you shall find most of the rest laid out in meditation and prayer, as appears, Psa. cxix. We have Elias at prayer under the juniper-tree; Peter on the house-top; Cornelius in a corner of his house; yea, our blessed Saviour, whose soul could have fasted longest without any inward impair through the want of this repast, yet none more frequent in it; early in the morning he is praying alone, Mark i. 35, and late in the evening, Matt. xiv. 23; and this was his usual practice, as may be gathered from Luke xxii. 39 compared with Luke xxi. 37. Thus Christ sanctified this duty by his own example; yea, we have a sweet promise to the performance of it, and God doth not use to promise a reward for that which he commanded us not to do: Matt. vi. 6, 'But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.' Where our Saviour takes it for granted, that every child of God will be often praying to his heavenly Father, and therefore he rather encourageth them in the work he seeth them about, than commands them to it. 'When you pray;' as if he had said, I know you cannot live without prayer; now, when you would give God a visit 'enter into thy closet.'

Section II.—But why must the Christian maintain this secret intercousse with God? First, in regard of God; he hath an eye to see our secret tears, and an ear to hear our secret groans, therefore we ought to pour them out to him in secret. It is a piece of gross superstition to bind this only to place or company: 'I will that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, 1 Tim. ii. 8. God is everywhere to be found; therefore we are to pray everywhere. O what a comfort is it to a gracious soul, that he can never be out of God's sight or hearing, and therefore never out of his care! This comforted holy David; his friends and kinsmen, alas! were afar off; he might lie upon his sick bed, and cry till his heart ached, and not make them hear; but see how he pacifies himself in all his solitude,—'Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee,' Psa. xxxviii. 9. Jacob little thought that he had a son a prisoner in Egypt, laden with irons that entered into his soul; but he had a God that was nigh unto him all the time of his distress, and heard the cry of the prisoner, though his earthly father never dreamt of any such matter. Great and rich are the returns which in Scripture we find to be sent from heaven upon the solitary adventure of the saints in this bottom. 'This poor man cried, and the Lord saved him out of all his troubles,' Psa. xxxiv. 6: as if he had said, Haply you are afraid to be so bold as to go alone and visit God in secret: though you venture to join with others in prayer, and hope to find welcome when you go with such good company; yet you are ready to say, Will God look upon me, or my single prayer? Yes behold me, saith David, who am newly come from his door, where I lay praying in as poor a condition, and as sad a plight, as ever beggar was at man's: a poor exile, in the midst of my enemies, who thirsted for my blood; yet I, and that when I betrayed so much dastardly unbelief, cried, and God heard. Who, then, need be afraid, either from his outward straits or inward infirmities, if sincere, to go with a humble boldness unto God? Nay, farther, as God hath a pitiful eye to see when we pray in secret, so also an angry eye that sees when we do not. I have read of a prince that would, in the evening, walk abroad in disguise, and listen under his subjects' windows, whether they talked of him, and what they said. God's eye and ear watch us,—'The Lord hearkened, and heard it,' Mal. iii. 16: and he that hath a book of remembrance for his saints that fear him, and think upon his name, hath also a black bill for their names who shut him out of their hearts and closets. The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God.' Though his seat be in heaven, yet his eye is on earth; and what doth he observe, but whether

Digitized by Google

men 'understand and seek God?' Secondly, In regard of ourselves, the more to prove our sincerity. I do not say that to pray in secret amounts to an infallible character of sincerity; for hypocrisy may creep into our closet, when the door is shut closest, as the frogs did into Pharaoh's bedchamber; yet this is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk: and though his heart may be naught that frequently performs secret duty, yet we may be sure his heart cannot be good whose devotion is all spent before men, and is a stranger to secret communion with God. Our Saviour, in drawing the hypocrite's picture, has made this the very cast of his countenance, Matt. vi. 5; 'When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues,' &c. 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet.' The command sends us as well to the closet as to the church; and he is a hypocrite that chooseth one, and neglects the other, for thereby it appears he makes conscience of neither: he likes that which may gain him the name of being religious in the opinion of men, and therefore he puts on a religious habit abroad; but, in the meantime, lives like an atheist at home. Such a one may, for a time, be the world's saint; but God will at last expose him, and present him before the eyes of all the world for a hypocrite. The true lover delights to visit his friend when he may find him alone, and enjoy privacy with him: and I have read of a devout person, who, when the set time for his private devotions was come, would, whatever company he was in, break from them with this handsome speech, 'I have a friend that stays for me,—farewell.' It is worth parting with our best friends on earth to enjoy communion with the God of heaven. One called his friends thieves, because they stole time from him. There are no worse thieves than those who rob us of our praying seasons. Thirdly, In regard of the duty itself: and the influence which the holy management of it would have upon the Christian's life. This duty is a main pillar to uphold the whole frame of our spiritual building; without this, the Christian's house, as Solomon saith of the sluggard's, will drop out at the windows. That which is most necessary to keep the house standing is under ground (I mean the foundation:) that which keeps the man alive is the heart, which is unseen. Cease your secret communion, and you undermine your house, you stab godliness to the heart. If the tree grow not in the root, it will ere long, wither in the branch. He that declines this way can be a gainer in no other, how zealous soever he may appear; such a one may pray to the quickening and comfort of others, but he will get little of either himself. The truth is, this is the first step toward apostacy; backsliders grow first out of acquaintance with God in secret; their delight in this duty declines by little and little, then are they less frequent in their visits, upon which follows a casting off the duty entirely; but yet they may appear great zealots in public ordinances: but if they recover not what they have lost in their secret trade, they will ere long break here also.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN THE LOW STOOP OF THE DIVINE MAJESTY, TO HOLD COMMUNION WITH A SAINT IN CLOSET PRAYER; ALSO HOW THEY BRING THEIR GRACE IN QUESTION WHO LIVE IN THE TOTAL NEGLECT OF IT.

Let us here admire the condescending love of God, in stooping to hold communion with his poor creatures, while they are clad with rags of mortality, and those besmeared with many sinful pollutions. Is it not enough, that in heaven, when we shall put on our robes of glory, God will take us into his royal presence, and give us places with those that stand about him; but will he even now, while our garments smell of the prison, and before our graveclothes be thrown off, admit us to so near an accession? What manner of love is this, that we should now be called the children of God, and as such have liberty to speak our broken language, and that with delight to him who continually hath the praises of blessed angels and glorified saints sounding in his ears? Nay, more, this liberty to be indulged by us, not only when we come together, and make up a choir in our public worship, but in our secret addresses; that a poor creature, whenever he hath a heart to step aside, and give God a visit in any corner of his house, should find his arms open to embrace him; this is so stupendous, that we may better admire than express it. Should we see a poor beggar speaking fami-

Digitized by Google

liarly with a great king, who, while all his courtiers stand bare before him, takes him into his embraces, and lets him familiarly whisper in his ear, might it not excite our wonder at such an act of grace from majesty to a beggar? This is the glorious privilege of every saint on earth, who, when he prays, hath liberty to come up to the throne of God, surrounded with glorious angels, and to pour out his soul as freely into his bosom, as the child to his indulgent father. O! thank our good friend and brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, for this; it is he that brings us into the presence of God, and sets us before his face, as Joseph his brethren before Pharaoh. Whose face need a saint fear to look upon, that may thus boldly speak to God? Comfort thyself with this, when thou goest with thy petition to any great man on earth, and he will not be seen of thee, or such a rich kinsman, and he will not own thee; turn thy back on them both, and go to thy God,—he will look on thee, and in his Son own thee for his child; thou hast his ear who can command their heart and purse too. Jacob's prayer so altered his brother's purposes, that he, who meant to kill him, falls on his neck to kiss him. Nehemiah had a boon to beg of the Persian king, and he goes, a carnal heart would think, the farthest way about to obtain it; he knocks first at heaven's door,—'Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man,' Nehem. i. 11; and now to court he goes, where, behold, he finds the door open before he knocks, for the 'king saith unto him, For what dost thou make request?' chap. ii. 4. We may open two doors with this one key; at the prayer of this holy man, God and man both give their gracious answer. The Christian surely cannot long be in want, if he can but pray; as one said, the pope could never want money so long as he could hold a pen in his hand. It is but praying in faith, and the thing is done which the Christian would have; 'Be careful for nothing, but let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God shall keep your hearts,' &c., Phil. iv. 6, 7. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord,—and he shall bring it to pass,' Psa. xxxvii. 5. The saint's bills are received at first sight, whatever the sum is. Christ is our undertaker to see it paid, and his credit holds still in his Father's bosom, and will, to procure welcome for all his saints that shall be found on earth. Secondly, Those who are unacquainted with this duty cannot be recognized as saints. What! a saint! and content with what thou hast of God in joint communion with others, so as never to desire any privacy between God and thyself! Canst thou find no errand to invite thee to speak with God alone? Thou bringest thy saintship into question. When a prince passeth by, then all will come in a throng to see him: but his child thinks not this enough, but goes home with him, must live with him, and be under his eye daily. Hypocrites and profane ones will crowd into public ordinances, but a gracious soul cannot live without more retired converse with him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS TO KEEP UP SECRET PRAYER, AND DIRECTIONS AS TO THEIR MANAGEMENT OF IT.

Be exhorted, O ye saints, to hold up your secret acquaintance with God! Believest thou that this is thy duty? I know that thou believest. Dost thou pray in secret? I dare not question it; the Spirit of Christ which is in thee will not suffer thee to be wholly a stranger from it. But I would provoke thee to be more abounding therein; 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God,—that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God,' 1 John v. 13; that is that you may believe more: and these things do I now write to you who call upon the name of God in secret, that you may call oftener: and this you need, except you lived farther from Satan's quarters than the rest of your brethren. There is no duty more opposed by Satan or our own slothful hearts than this. The devil can allow you your church prayers, your family duties, and now and then a formal one in your closet, and yet make his market of you. Therefore, take along with you these directions for your better managing thereof. First, Let it be your constant trade. Rolling stones gather no moss: unstable and inconstant hearts will never excel in this or any other duty. The spirit of prayer is a grace infused, but advanced to farther degrees by daily exercise. Frequency begets familiarity, and familiarity con-

Digitized by Google

fidence. We go boldly into his house whom we often visit. Secondly, Let it be true secret prayer, and not have its name for nought; take heed no noise be heard abroad of what thou doest in secret. 'Enter into thy closet,' said Christ, 'and when thou hast shut thy door, pray.' Be sure thou shuttest it so close that no wind of vain-glory comes in; rather than there should, shut the door of thy lips as well as thy closet; God can hear, though thy mouth delivers not the message. It is true, when Daniel prayed, he opened his window, but it was to show his faith, not his pride; that he might let the world know how little he feared their wrath, not that he coveted their praise. God observes which way the eye turns, and it is a dishonour he will not bear, that thou shouldst be expecting thy reward from man and not himself; this is to change heaven for earth, and that is a bad bargain. Thirdly, Be free and open, and hide nothing from him: to be reserved and close are against the law of friendship. 'I have called you friends,' saith Christ, 'for all things I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you.' Is Christ so open-hearted, as not to conceal anything he knows for our good? And wouldst thou have any secret box in thy cabinet, that he should not see? Art thou confessing thy sins? Strip thy soul naked, and shuffle not with God; if thou dost, it speaks two things, that thou hast some secret design of sin for the future, or harbourest an ill opinion of God in thy breast concerning thy past sins, as if he would not be faithful to forgive what thou art free to confess: like some prodical child, who, though his father promiseth to pay all his debts, and forgive him also; yet, because the sum is vast, dares not trust him with the whole truth. The first is not the spot of God's children; but into the latter they sometimes fall, and for a while may be held by Satan and their own unbelief. But consider, whatever thy sin is, and how great soever, yet the way to obtain pardon is by confessing; neither is it concealed from God, though thou confess it not. But God likes a confession out of thy own mouth so well, that as soon as thou layest open thy own shame, he hath obliged himself faithfully to cover it with the mantle of pardoning mercy; 1 John i. 9, 'If we confess our sins, he is just and faithful to forgive us our sins.' Again, art thou making thy requests to God? Carry no burden away upon thy spirit through a foolish modesty, and fear of troubling God too much, so long as the promise is on thy side. Christ never complained that his saints opened their mouths, or enlarged their desires, too wide in prayer; nay, he bids his disciples open them wider, and tells them, they had asked nothing; that is, nothing proportionable to his large heart to give. Fourthly, It must be seasonable; this gives everything its beauty. First, take heed that it doth not jostle with public worship. The devil takes great pleasure in setting the ordinances of God at variance one against another: some he persuades to cry up public prayer, and neglect secret; and others he would fain bring out of love with the public; whereas, there is room enough for both in thy Christian course. Moses, though he killed the Egyptian, yet the two Israelites, when scuffling together, he laboured to reconcile. Beware of giving Satan such an advantage, as to neglect the communion of saints in public, under a pretence of praying in thy closet; this is to set one ordinance to fight with another. Deny thy presence in public, and thou art sure to lose God's in thy closet: He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination,, Prov. xxviii. 9. Secondly, look that it interferes not with thy duty in thy particular calling. As thou art to shut thy closet door to pray, so thou art to open thy shop to follow thy calling in the world. Go into thy closet before thou goest into thy shop, or else thou art an atheist; but when thou hast been with God there, attend thy calling, or else thou art an hypocrite. Thou consistest of soul and body,—God divides thy employment between both; he that is not diligent in duty, is conscientious in neither. When every part in the body hath its due nourishment distributed to it, health is preserved: so he is the sound Christian that divides his care wisely for his spiritual state, and temporal also. Sleep not away thy time for prayer in the morning, and then think thou art sufficiently excused for omitting it, because thy worldly business calls thee another way. Jade not thy body with over-labouring, nor overcharge thy mind with too heavy a load of worldly cares in the day, and then think, that the weariness of the one, and discomposure of the other, will discharge thee from praying at night; this is to make a sin thy apology for neglecting a duty.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DUTY OF THOSE THAT HAVE THE CHARGE OF A FAMILY TO SET UP THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN IT.

THE second kind of composed prayer is that which is performed in joint communion with others; and this is double, either private or public. First, family prayer.

By a family, I mean a society of certain persons, in mutual relation to each other, natural or civil, who live together under the domestic government of husband, master, or parent. Wherever such a family is, it is the duty of the governor of it to set up the worship of God, and this part of worship in particular, prayer in his family. The Jews had their family-sacrifice, Exod. xii. 21, which the master of the house performed at home. There still remains a spiritual sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, which every master of a family is with his household to offer up to God. The private house is the Christian's chapel of ease, to worship God in daily with his company. The church began in a family, and it is upheld still by the piety of private families: if the nursery be not preserved, the orchard must needs in time decay. But the question will be, how can it be proved that family prayer is a duty? I hope none will require an express place of Scripture commanding this *in terminis*, or else not believe it a duty incumbent upon them. This were the way not only to lose this part of God's worship, but other duties also. It will trouble us to find an express word, commanding us in plain terms to keep the Christian sabbath, or to baptize our infant children; yet God forbid we should, with some, shake off these ordinances upon this account. That which by necessary consequence can be deduced from Scripture, is Scripture, as well as that which is laid down in express terms. And if this will content you, which I am sure should, I hope to give you satisfaction.

SECTION I.—That general command for prayer, will bring this of family prayer within the compass of our duty; 1 Tim. ii. 8, 'I will therefore that men pray everywhere;' if everywhere, then surely in our families, where God hath set us in so near relation to one another. Paul salutes the church in Aquila and Priscilla's house, Rom. xvi. 5. And were they not a strange church who lived together without praying together? Had they deserved so high and honourable a name, if they had thus shut God out of doors? This were to call them a church, as a grove is called *lucus a non lucendo*. The Jews, when they built them a new house to dwell in, were to dedicate it, Deut. xx. 5: and the manner of dedicating their new-built houses was with prayer, as you may see by the title of the thirtieth psalm, penned on this occasion, 'A psalm and song at the dedication of the house of David.' This they did, first to express their thankfulness to God, who had given them an habitation. Indeed, it is no small mercy to have a settled place for our abode, a convenient house for ourselves and relations peaceably to dwell in; it is more than those precious saints had, Heb. xi. 38, 'who wandered in dens and caves of the earth:' yea, more than our Saviour himself had: 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head,' Matt. viii. 20. Secondly, by this they were admonished to acknowledge themselves tenants to God, and that they held their houses of him their great Landlord, upon condition of doing him homage, by making their houses as so many sanctuaries for his worship.

SECTION II.—The trust which governors of families are charged with will evince it is their duty to set up prayer in their families. Every master of a family hath the care of souls upon him; he is prophet, king, and priest in his own house, and from these will appear his duty. First, he is a prophet, to teach and instruct his family. Wives are bid to learn at home of their husbands, 1 Cor. xiv. 35; then surely they are to teach them at home. Parents are commanded to instruct their children; 'Ye shall teach them when thou sittest in thine house,' Deut. xi. 19. 'Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' Eph. vi. 4. Now there is a teaching and admonition by prayer to God, and praising of God, as well as in catechizing of them; Col. iii. 16, 'Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns.'

Digitized by Google

The master's praying with his family, will teach them how to pray when by themselves. The confessions he makes, petitions he puts up, and mercies he acknowledgeth in his family duty, are an excellent means to furnish them with matter for their devotion. How comes it to pass that many servants and children, when they come to be themselves heads of families, are so unable to be their relations' mouth to God in prayer, but because they have in their minority lived in prayerless families, and were kept in ignorance of this duty, whereby they have neither head nor heart, knowledge nor affections, suitable for such a work? Again, he is a king in his house, to rule his family in the fear of God: as the political magistrate's duty is to set up the true worship of God in his kingdom, so he is to do it in his house: he is to say with Joshua, 'I and my house, we will serve the Lord.' Would it be a sin in a prince not to set up the public worship of God in his kingdom, although he served God himself in his palace? Surely, then it is a sin in the governor of a family not to set it up in his house, though he prays himself in his closet. Lastly, he is a priest in his own house, and where there is a priest there must be a sacrifice; and what sacrifice among Christians, but the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving? Thus David went from public ordinances to perform private duty with his family,—'Then David returned to bless his household;' that is, saith one upon the place, he returned to worship God in private with them, and to crave a blessing from God upon them.

SECTION III.—The practice of saints in all ages hath been to have a religious care of their families. Good Joshua promised for himself and his house, that they would serve the Lord. If he meant the inward worship of God, he promised more than he was able to perform, in regard of his family, for he could not thrust grace into their hearts: we must therefore understand him, that it should not be his fault if they did not, for he would use all means in his power to make them: he would set them a holy example, and take care they should not live without the worship of God in his family. We find Elisha praying with his servant, 2 Kings iv. 33, master and man together; queen Esther and her maids keeping a private fast in her family, Esther iv. 16. Now it were uncharitable to think, that she was a stranger to the ordinary exercise of this duty, who was so forward to perform the extraordinary, and put others also upon it. Surely this gracious woman did not begin her acquaintance with this duty now, and take it up only in her present strait. That were a gluttonous fast indeed, that should devour the worship of God in her family for all the year after. Cornelius's family religion is upon record, Acts x. 2: 'A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.' Mark, he was a devout man, and feared God with all his house. Fear is often put for the worship of God. God is called the 'fear of Isaac,' Gen. xxx. 53; that is, the God whom Isaac worshipped. 'Him shall ye fear and him shall ye worship,' 2 Kings xvii. 36. 'And ye shall not fear other gods,' ver. 37; that is, ye shall not worship or pray unto them. Thus we may conceive Cornelius was a devout man, and feared God with his house. Surely he that was so merciful to the poor at his door, to refresh their pinched bowels with his alms, could not be so cruel to his relations' souls within his house, as to lock up his religion in a closet from them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THREE OBJECTIONS AGAINST THIS DUTY IN FAMILIES ANSWERED.

BUT what necessity in there, that a family must meet jointly to worship God together? Will it not serve if every one prays for himself in his closet?—A family is a collective body; as such it owes a worship to God. It is he that 'setteth the solitary in families,' Psa. lxviii. 6; and as their founder, will be vouched by them: 'Pour out thy fury upon the families that call not on thy name,' Jer. x. 25. It holds in domestic worship, as well as national, for he looks for the one as well as the other. There are family sins, and these are to be confessed by the family, as national sins by the nation. There are family wants, and they require the joint supplications of the family. There are family employments, and those call for the united force of the family to pull down a

Digitized by Google

blessing upon their joint labours for the good of the whole. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.' And is it not fit that they who join in the work should join in a prayer for a blessing on their endeavour? There are family mercies that the whole society share in; and is it not meet that they which eat of the same feast should join in the same song of praise to the founder of it? In a word, there are judgments that may affect the whole family; and where all are concerned in the danger, all should lend their help to prevent it: many hands make light work. A rope twisted of many cords is stronger than those very cords if single; and so the prayer of many together is more likely to prevail, because it is likely to be more fervent than of the same persons severally employed in their closets, though I would not have one to interfere with the other: there is room for both. Polanus tells us of a town in the territory of Bern, in Switzerland, consisting of ninety houses, that was, in the year 1584, destroyed by an earthquake, except the half of one house, where the master of the family was earnestly praying, with his wife and children, to God.

O, but I have not abilities and gifts for such a work, and it is better left undone than spoiled in the doing. No more hadst thou skill and ability for thy trade when thou went first apprentice. Apply thy mind to the work, bind the duty upon thy conscience,—search the Scriptures, where matter for prayer is laid up, and rules how to perform the duty; study thy heart, and observe the state of thy family, till the sense of the sins, wants, and daily mercies thereof, which thou hast lodged in thy memory, be left warm on thy spirit; in a word, exercise thyself frequently in secret prayer; be earnest there for the Spirit to assist thee in thy family service, and take heed of driving the Holy Spirit from thee, whose assistance thou prayest for, by sloth, worldliness, pride, or any other course of wickedness. Up, and be doing, and thou mayest comfortably expect God will be with thee to assist and accept thee in the work. Moses was sick of the employment to which God called him, and fain would have put it off with this excuse,—'I am not eloquent, but slow of speech:' but this objection was soon answered,—'And the Lord said unto Moses, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Exod. iv. 11. His call was extraordinary, and his assistance was such. Thy call to this duty, as the head of a family, is ordinary, and so thou mayest look for ordinary assistance. Haply thou shalt never have an ability to express thyself as some others; but let not that discourage thee: God looks not at the pomp of words and variety of expression, but the sincerity and devotion of the heart. The key opens the door not because it is gilt, but because it fits the lock. Let but the matter of thy prayer be according to God's mind, and the temple of thy heart humble and fervent, and no fear but thou shalt speed: yea, let thy prayer be old, pray to-day what thou didst yesterday; be but sure to bring new affections with thy old prayer, and thou shalt be received friendly into God's presence, though thou canst not on a sudden put thy requests into a new shape. God will not shut his child out of doors because he comes not every day in a new-fashioned suit.

Others there are who object not their own weakness as the reason of their not praying in their families, but the wickedness of others in their family. They are confident enough of their own gifts, but question others' grace, and whether they may pray with such. There may be such in thy family; but is this a ground to lay aside the worship of God? By this, the worship of God should not only be laid aside in most private houses, but in all our public congregations. If thou mayest not pray in thy family, because a wicked person is present, then you must not join in prayer with a public congregation, because thou canst never be assured that they are all godly; nor must the minister pray there, for fear some wicked one should be in the company; and so this part of Divine worship must be thrown out of the church till we can find an assembly made up of all true saints; and where such a one ever was, or will be, on this side heaven, no one, I think, is able to tell. Surely, the saints in Scripture were not thus scrupulous. How often did Christ himself pray with his disciples, though a Judas was among them! I have elsewhere clearly, I think, proved, that it is the duty of all, even of the wicked, to pray; and that God will never charge

Digitized by Google

the act of prayer upon him as a sin, but his remissness therein; much less will he impute to thee another's sinful frame of heart, with whom thou joinest in prayer. Pray thou in faith, and his unbelief shall not prejudice thy faith, nor his pride thy humility. Thou joinest with him in the duty, but hast no communion with his sin. You may as well say, if a thief in the time of prayer should pick another's pocket, that all the company are guilty of his theft. How much better were it, to fear lest thou pray with a wicked heart in thy bosom, than with a wicked person in thy family! Thou art likely neither to hurt thy own soul by praying in his company, nor better his by omitting the duty for his sake. May be, though he be carnal, yet he is outwardly complying; and how knowest thou but thy prayer may pierce his heart, and assist toward his conversion? Such I have heard of, who have had the first sensible impression made upon their hearts in this duty. If he be not only carnal, but a mocker of the worship of God, and a disturber of the duty, better thou shouldst, with Abraham, turn such an Ishmael out of doors, than, for his sake, turn God out by denying him the worship due unto him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A REPROOF TO THOSE THAT UNNECESSARILY THROW THEMSELVES TO LIVE IN SUCH FAMILIES WHERE THE WORSHIP OF GOD IS NOT SET UP.

Dost thou know whither thou goest? Thou art running, with Jonah, from the presence of the Lord, and mayest expect a storm to be sent after thee. Haply thou art a servant, who once lived in a godly family, where thou hadst many sweet privileges and spiritual advantages; a table spread every day for thy soul as often as for thy body, thereby enjoying a kind of heaven upon earth; but, for a little ease in thy work, or gain in thy wages, thou hast made this unhappy change, to put thyself under the roof of those who will sooner teach thee to curse than to pray; and where, by the orders kept in the family, thou canst not know a Lord's day from a week day, or whether there be such a thing as religious worship due to thy Maker or no. Alas, poor creature! What! wert thou in so green a pasture, and now wandering upon the barren heath, where nothing is to be got for thy precious soul;—where (as on the mountain of Gilboa) none of those heavenly dews fall, with which thy soul was wont to be watered! Truly, thou art gone out of God's blessing into the warm sun. Had God, indeed, cast thee by a necessary providence on such a place, thou mightest then have hope to keep thy spiritual state, though wanting thy former repast; but being thy own choice, it is to be feared thou wilt soon languish: leanness is likely to shrivel up thy soul, while thou hast thy fat morsels in thy mouth; thy spirit will grow poor, though thy purse may grow heavy: we shall have thee ere long complaining, as Naomi, that thou wentest out full, but camest home empty. How darest thou choose to dwell where God himself doth not visit with his gracious presence? 'He inhabits the praises of his people,' and takes his abode in the house of prayer; and if the Holy Spirit dwells not, walks and breathes not, in the house, it must needs be haunted with the evil one. Make thy stay there as short as possible. Leave the dead to dwell with the dead: thy safety will be to get among better company, Is the church so barren of godly families, that none such are to be found who will open their door to let thee in? Go, inquire where such live, and offer to do the meanest office in that house where thou mayest enjoy thy former privileges for thy soul. The very beasts groan to serve the wicked; whereas holy angels themselves disdain not to minister unto the saints. But haply thou wilt say, it is not thy choice, but necessity. Thou art by thy parents put apprentice to a master that is wicked; or thou livest under thy own parent's shadow, and thou canst not help it, though they be profane; or with a husband, whom thou didst hope would prove a kind help to thy soul, but thou findest it otherwise; what would you have us to do in this case?

First, Mourn under it as thy great affliction. Thus David did, when he lived in Saul's wicked family, whose court, for irreligion and profaneness, he compareth to the barbarous Arabians, and profane Ishmaelites, lamenting that he was under the necessity of living with such, whom, by his relation, he could not well leave, and, for their wickedness, he could worse bear; 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar.'

Digitized by Google

Secondly, Be the more in thy secret communion with God. If thou hadst to live with a niggard, who pinched thy belly, wouldst thou not, though thou hadst but a penny in thy purse, lay it out for bread rather than starve? Thou hadst need have a bit the more in a corner, because thou art cut short of thy daily bread in the family: thy soul cannot live without communion with God. Take that thyself which others will not be so kind to allow thee, and that thou mayest husband all thy ends of time the better, thou shalt thus, by God's blessings,—First, Keep thy spiritual life and vigour: Secondly, Be antidoted against the infection of that contaminated air thou inhalest; and,—Thirdly, Have a vent to ease thy incumbered spirit of those griefs, reproaches, and trials thou canst not but meet with from such relations. Gracious Hannah had an adversary in the same family, who provoked her sorely, even to make her fret; but this sent her to God in prayer, and there she eased her soul of her burden.

Thirdly, Adorn thy piety to God by the faithful performance of thy duty to thy relations, though they be not so good. Art thou a servant, and thy master profane? Be thou submissive and humble, diligent and faithful; let him see that thou darest not rob him of thy time by sloth, or wrong him in his estate by falseness (though he be a thief to thy soul by not providing for it), but dost, with thy utmost skill and strength, endeavour to discharge thy trust to him. We see too often, that the unfaithfulness and negligence of some professing servants, set their carnal masters farther off from the worship of God than before, yea, make them loathe the duties of religion, which otherwise they might have been won unto, till at last they come to think all profession in the duties of piety toward God an hypocritical cloak to cover some unfaithfulness to men, and to say of their servants, when they beg leave to go to wait on God in his ordinances, as Pharoah of the Israelites, 'Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore say ye, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord,' Exod. v. 17. Thus the name of God, and his doctrine, are blasphemed through the ill-behaviour of professing servants, 1 Tim. vi. 1. Again, art thou a wife, and thy husband carnal, who lives without any care of his own soul, or those under his roof? Pray the more for him, because he prays not with thee; pray thou for thy family in thy closet, though he neglects it in the house: but with this, be sure to commend thy piety to thy husband's conscience, and make it as legible as possible to his eye, by thy meekness of wisdom in thy carriage to him and thy family. A fair print invites to read the book; religion fairly printed in thy meek and dutiful behaviour to him, and discretion in all thy affairs, may in time win him to the consideration of the excellency of religion. He is an unwise angler that scares the fish he desires to take; and she is an unwise Christian, that, by her peevish and undutiful carriage, offends her husband, whose conversion she desires and prays for.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A WORD OF COUNSEL TO THOSE THAT LIVE IN PRAYING FAMILIES.

First, Bless God for casting thy lot in so pleasant and fruitful a soil for thy soul, where thou mayest suck in the sweet air of God's Spirit, that breathes from thy godly parents or other governors, at the throne of grace, from day to day: that thou art not placed in some blind, atheistical family, among whom thou mightest have passed thy days without any knowledge of thy Maker, and, with them, have been involved in that curse of God, which is in the house of the wicked, and hangs like a black cloud in the threatning, ready to pour down upon the families that call not upon his name. Look round thy neighbourhood, and see how many families there are who live like brutes, as in so many dark dens, where none of that heavenly light is seen from one end of the year to the other, which shines on thy face every day! What nurture and breeding could thy soul have had under the tutoring of such parents and masters, who themselves live without God in the world? The queen of Sheba counted them happy that stood before Solomon, not so much that they might see his pomp, but hear his wisdom. O, happy thou that ministerest unto a godly master, art under gracious parents, or yoked to a holy husband; from whose devout prayers, pious counsels, and christian examples, thou mayest gain more, than if they had the wealth, delicacies, and preferments of Solomon's court to confer upon thee.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, See that you improve this spiritual advantage, or else it will go worse with you than others. Rebellious Israel is told, they shall know that they had a prophet among them; the meaning is, they shall know it to their cost: and so shall those that have lived in families, under such governors, who went before them, and, as it were, chalked out a way to heaven by their godly example, lamenting over their precious souls so often with their prayers and tears; if such miscarry, they shall know to their terror what families they once lived in, but had not a heart to prize or improve the mercy. God forbid that any of you should find the way to hell out of such doors, and force your way to damnation through such means. What will Cain answer, when his father that begat him shall bear witness against him, and say, Lord, this wicked child of mine never learned his atheism of me; I brought him to thy worship, and taught him thy fear, but he liked it not, and first proved a murderer, and then an apostate: first, he behaved himself wickedly in thy service, and then ran out of thy doors and cast it quite off. What will then the flouting wife of David—who though of a wicked flock, was privileged with so gracious a husband—say, when she shall be accused for making him her laughing-stock for his zeal in the worship of God? Or how will the wicked children of the same holy man, who walked with such uprightness in his house, look their godly father in the face at the great day? You, my children, said dying Mr. Bolton, dare not, I believe, meet me at the day of judgment in an unregenerate state. The weight of such holy men's prayers and admonitions will then sink their ungodly relations deeper into hell than others, who drop thither out of dark and blind families.

CHAPTER XL.

A WORD TO THOSE GOVERNORS OF FAMILIES, THAT HAVE NOT THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN THEIR HOUSES.

You that are heads of families, but yet have not had a heart to set up the worship of God in them,—I am afraid God hath little from you in your closets, who hath none from you in your families: it is no breach of charity to suspect your care for your own souls, when you shew none for your relations'. If ever thou hadst been acquainted with God, and tasted any sweetness in secret communion with him, could thou thus rob thy family of so great a blessing? Could you find such a treasure, and hide it from them you love so well? Have they not souls as precious as thy own? Art thou not willing they should find the way to heaven as well as thyself? Yea, art thou not God's trustee, to take care of their souls as well as their bodies? Dost thou owe no more to thy child, or thy servant, than to thy hog, or horse? Their bodies are looked to, and wilt thou do no more for the others? How knowest thou but thy holy example in the duties of God's worship among them, may leave such impressions on their hearts as shall never be worn off? Did you never hear any to the praise of God acknowledge, that the first turn towards heaven they ever had, was by living in such a godly family, where, with the worship of God a savour and secret sense of the things of God did secretly steal into their hearts? Certainly, were our youth more acquainted with the duties of religion in private, the minister's work would be much facilitated in public; by this, the consciences of many would be preserved tender, and so be more pliable to the counsels of the word preached: whereas now the devil hath a sad advantage (from the irreligion that is in most families) to harden their hearts to such a degree, as renders them almost impenetrable. It is no wonder to see that tree thrives not, which stands but little in the sun; and as little wonder to see them continue profane and wicked, that but once in a week come under the beams of an ordinance. One well compareth the public ministry to the mason that builds the house, and family governors to them that make the brick. Now if you, by neglecting your duty, bring clay instead of brick, you make the minister's work double. The truth is, the neglect of family worship opens a wide flood-gate to let in a deluge of profaneness. Thou livest now without the worship of God in thy family, and perhaps in a few years, from thee many other families may arise, and most likely they will follow thy copy: indeed, it were a wonder that they who are taught no better should do otherwise: and so irreligion is likely to spread apace. When thy head is laid in the dust, thy profaneness is not buried

Digitized by Google

in thy grave with thee; no, thou leavest others behind to keep it alive. O, how dismal is it to lay the foundation of a sin to many generations! The children unborn may rise up and curse such. If I had heard my Father pray, may the child say, (in a dying hour,) or had been led into the acquaintance of the worship of God by his example, then had not I lived like a heathen as I have done. Well, as you would not have your children and servants meet you in the other world with their mouths full of accusations; or, if you dread not this, as you would not have them prove a plague and scourge to you in this world, let not your family government be irreligious: it is just that God should suffer thy servant to be unfaithful to thee in thy estate, who art so to his soul; than thy children, when old, should forget their duty to thee, that didst bring them up like heathens, without learning them their duty to God.

CHAPTER XLI.

TO THOSE GOVERNORS OF FAMILIES THAT PERFORM THIS DUTY.

SECTION I.—Think it not enough to prove thee a saint that thou prayest in thy family; you may set up the worship of God in your house, and not enthrone God in your hearts. God forbid that you should bless yourselves in this, and reckon yourselves as saints because of this; alas! you are not as yet got so far as some hypocrites. The duty is good, but the outward performance of it doth not demonstrate you to be so. There are many turnings to hell nearer heaven than this. From the act, therefore, look to the end thou proposest to thyself in it. He is a foolish archer, that shoots his arrow before he hath taken his aim. The question God asks, is, Dost thou at all pray to me, even to me? Thou mayest possibly affect others with thy praying, yea, be instrumental to break their hearts by thy confessions, and refresh their spirits by the sweet expressions that flow from thee, and yet thyself playing the hypocrite all the while. It behoves thee therefore to consider, what is the spring that set up this duty in thy family: is it not to gain an opinion of being religious in others' thoughts? If so, thou playest at small game; indeed, religion were a sorry thing, if this were all to be got by it. When thou hast obtained this end, it will not in the least ease thy conscience, nor quench one spark in hell's tormenting fire for thee; if this be what thou huntest after, it is a question whether thou believest there be such a place or no. These few principles well girded by faith about the loins of thy mind,—that there is a God, and he a rewarder of those that diligently seek him; that heaven is prepared for the sincere, and hell gapes for the hypocrite, would be enough to set thy heart right in the duty. Though the traveller minds not much his way, where he apprehends no danger; yet when he comes to pass over a narrow bridge, where a wry step may hazard his life by falling into a deep river that runs on each hand, he will surely watch his eye, which is to guide his foot. This is thy case. Prayer is a work as solemn as any thou canst go about; a wrong motive in this may hazard thy soul as much as a wry look thy body in the other. We need do no more to lose our souls, than to seek ourselves.

SECTION II.—Take heed thou blottest not thy holy duties with an unholy life. If thou meanest to foul thy hands with sin's black work in the day, why dost thou wash them in the morning with prayer? It is to no purpose to begin with God, and to keep the devil company all the day after: religious orders in thy house, and a disordered conversation, ill agree. O, do not render the worship of God base to the thoughts of thy family! Those who are fond of wine, yet feel an aversion to it when brought in a cup that is unclean. The duties of God's worship command reverence even from those that are carnal, but if performed by those that are loose and scandalous, they grow fulsome. Eli's sons made the people loathe the Lord's sacrifices. By thy religious duties thou settest a fair copy: O, do not write it in sinking paper! It is but a while thou art seen upon thy knees, and a little seeming zeal at thy devotion will not gild over a whole day's sinful miscarriage, spent in passion, idleness, riot, or any other unholy course. It is said that Christ preached with power and authority, not as the Scribes, Matt. vii. 29: not but they had authority to preach, for they sat in Moses's chair; but because they lost that reverence, by not walking suitably to their doctrine, which their place and work would have given them in the con-

Digitized by Google

sciences of their hearers: they said, and did not, and thereby rendered their doctrine ineffectual. If thou wouldst pray with authority and power, enforce thy duties with purity of life.

SECTION III.—Preserve peace and unity in thy family: a brawling family cannot be a praying family. The apostle exhorteth husband and wife to love and unite, lest their prayers be hindered, 1 Pet. iii. 7. Contentions in a family both hinder the spirit of prayer, and also the answer to prayer. First, They hinder the spirit of prayer. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of peace and love, and therefore delights not to breath in a troubled air; the ready way to send him going, is to brawl and chide. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,' saith the apostle, Eph. iv. 30 and that we may not, hear what his counsel is—'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice,' ver. 31: when these are gone, then, and not before, look for his sweet company. You may as well dwell comfortably together with your house on fire, as pray so together, when you in the house are on fire. Secondly, Contentions hinder the answer to our prayers: if we pray in anger, God cannot be pleased. 'The wrath of man fulfils not the righteousness of God.' A loud wind beats down the smoke. Our prayers are compared to incense, but they will never ascend to heaven till this storm be laid; go to pray in this plight, and God will bid you come when you are better agreed. The Spirit will not help in such prayers; and if the Spirit hath no hand in the inditing, Christ will have no hand in presenting the prayer; and if Christ present it not, be sure the father will not receive it, for 'through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father,' Eph. ii. 18.

SECTION IV.—Be very choice whom thou makest a member of thy family; get, if thou canst, such under thy roof as may assist thee in thy family worship. Though it be not thy sin to pray with a wicked wife and servant, yet it is thy sin to make choice of such for thy relations: yet how little is this considered! Though the blessing and comfort of the family be deeply concerned therein, a little beauty, honour, or riches, too often blind the eyes and bribe the judgment of those who we hope are gracious; they yoke themselves with such that are very unmeet to draw with them in heaven's way. David knew that Michal came of a bad stock, but perhaps he hoped to bring her over to the service of God, and we see what a grievous cross she proved to him. Solomon tells us of some that trouble their own house, Prov. xv. 27. He that for carnal reasons takes a wicked wife into his bosom, or servant into his family, is the man that is sure to do this. Perhaps when he would pray and praise God, his wife, like Job's, will bid him curse; when he is at duty, she will despise him in her heart, and make a mock of his zeal, as Michal did of David's. And so they who, for some natural abilities they see in a servant, venture on him, though wicked and ungodly, pay dearly for it; such often bring with them that plague of profaneness which infects the rest: so that what they earn their masters with their hands, they rob them of with their sins, which brings the curse of God on their family. Who that is wise would build a house with timber that is on fire! If the servant thou entertainest be wicked, fire is in him, which will endanger thy house. Make it therefore thy care to plant a godly family. This was David's resolution; perhaps he saw the evil of his former choice: 'Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way shall serve me: he that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight,' Psa. ci. 6, 7. Then the music will be sweet in thy family duties, when thou canst get into thy house such whose souls are in tune for those holy services thou art to join with them in.

SECTION V.—Keep a diary of thy family sins and mercies, that neither the one may escape thy confession and humiliation, nor the other thy grateful recognition: if this were observed, we should not come with such barren hearts to the work, as now most do. The brokenness of thy heart who prayest, will conduce toward the same disposition in those that join with thee. Nothing melts metal sooner, than to pour that on it which is melted. The drowsy speaker often prays the rest asleep that join with him. Take heed therefore of formality; that is the canker which eats out the very heart of religious duties. Remember thou art to thy family what the minister is to the public assembly.

Digitized by Google

As the deadness of his heart in prayer and preaching hath a bad operation upon his people, so hath thine on thy family: thou dost not only suffer loss thyself, but wrongest the rest of thy company: as when thou wastest thy estate, thy family all fare the worse for it; so when thou indisposest thyself for the duty of prayer, thy whole family goes by the loss with thee.

SECTION VI.—Observe the fittest seasons for duty in thy family, when with most freedom and least disturbance it may be performed. In the morning, take the opportunity, before the throng of worldly business crowds in upon thee. In some families I have observed, where they are in great employments, that if duty be delayed till some worldly occasions be despatched, then either it hath been shut out, or shut up in such straits of time, that the slovenly manner of performing it hath proved little better than the total neglect. To prevent this, it is best to forestall the world's market betimes in the morning, to set upon the duty, and offer up to God the first-fruits of the day, before our thoughts meet with a diversion. We read, Exod. xvi. 21, that the Israelites gathered their manna early in the morning, and 'when the sun waxed hot, it melted.' I wish such who have multiplicity of worldly occasions, to take their time for communion with God early, before their thoughts are hot in their worldly business, lest they then find them so scattered among other businesses, so as not easily to be gathered into a close attendance upon God in the duty. Again, when night comes, delay not the work till ye are more fit to go to your pillow than to your cushion, to sleep than to pray. If the eye sleep, the soul cannot well wake. Especially consider your servants that labour hard in the day; O do not expose them to the temptation of drowsy prayers! If our hearts took delight in the work, we would plan which would be the best time for communion with God, as lovers do how and when they may most privately meet together.

CHAPTER XLII.

OF PUBLIC PRAYER, THAT GOD REQUIRES IT, AND WHY?

THE second kind of social or joint prayer is public; that which is made in and by the church assembled together for the worship of God In handling of which I shall observe five things.

SECTION I.—That God requires a public worship of his people. This word worship is that honour and service we give to any one according to his excellency; and it is threefold,—Civil, Moral, and Divine. *Civil* worship is the due honour and service we pay to a person in place and power over us, as a prince, father, or master. *Moral*, is that due reverence and respect which we pay to a person that hath any excellency of virtue or place, without authority over us. Thus we give honour and veneration both to the saints living on earth with us, and to the angels and saints in heaven. *Religious* or *divine* worship, is the honour and service we give to that Being, which we believe is the author of our beings, and fountain of our happiness. Now this Being is God, and he only. To him therefore, and him alone, is religious worship due; Deut. vi. 13, 14: 'Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name; ye shall not go after other gods. This religious worship of the true God comes under divers distinctions, inward and outward, private and public. The public worship of God is the present subject of our discourse, that which the congregation performs to him in their religious assemblies, called, Psa. lxxxix. 5, 'the congregation of saints;' and ver. 7, 'the assembly of saints.' The church of God on earth began in a family, and so did the worship of God; but when the number increased, the worship of God became more public; Gen. iv. 26, 'Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord;' that is, they began publicly: Seth and other of the religious seed began to have their holy assemblies for the service of God. It is observable, how God, at the promulgation of the law on Sinai, when he first formed the Israelites into a polity, took a special care for erecting a public worship to his name. That was the day of their espousals, Jer. ii. 2; and then he instituted a solemn form of public worship, with exact rules how it should be performed. Our Lord Jesus took the same care for his gospel church, in appointing both church ordinances and officers to dispense the same.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.—Prayer is part of that religious worship, which the church is to perform to God in her public assemblies; yea, a principal part, and is therefore frequently put for the whole; Zech. viii. 21, 22: 'The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord.' It is a prophecy, how believers in gospel times should zealously provoke one another to go to the assemblies of the church (of which Jerusalem was a type) there to pray and worship God together. 'Is it not written,' saith our Saviour, 'My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?' Mark xi. 17. This was partially performed, when converts in the apostle's days flocked to Jerusalem to worship God. It is more fully accomplished in the church of Christ, gathered out of all nations, that should keep up the worship of God in her assemblies. St. Luke forgets not to mention this of prayer amongst the other duties of primitive Christians in their assemblies; Acts ii. 42: 'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.' By continuing stedfast in the apostles' doctrine, Mr. Perkins understands their attendance on the apostles' sermons; by fellowship, he understands their contributions to the poor, which were gathered at their assemblies, a work very fit for that place, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased; by breaking of bread, the celebration of the Lord's Supper; and by prayers, those which they put up together in communion at their church meetings. Nor is prayer put last because the least duty of the company; but rather, because it hath a necessary influence on them all; the word and sacraments which God useth to sanctify his people by, are themselves sanctified to us by prayer. And St. Paul, when he hath shewn, 1 Tim. i., what doctrine ministers are to preach in the church, he, in the second chapter, directs them what to insist chiefly on in their public prayer: 'I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,' verse 1, 2. This the church of Christ ever esteemed a principal part of their public worship. Tertullian, speaking of the assemblies of the church, saith, We meet in the congregation, that we may by our fervent prayers environ God, as an army doth a castle; and this holy force, with which we assault Heaven, pleaseth him.

SECTION III.—Why God requires a public worship, or a joint service of his people in communion together, and why this particular duty of prayer. First, As a free and open acknowledgment of their dependence on, and allegiance to God. It is most reasonable we should own the God we serve in the face of the world, and not, like Nicodemus, carry our religion in a dark lantern. He is unworthy of his master's service that is ashamed to wear his livery. 'Thou hast vouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people,' Deut. xxvi. 17, 18. Even heathens understand thus much, that they owe a free profession and public service to the god they vouch. 'All people walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever,' Mich. iv. 5. Now, by walking in the name of God, they mean they will invocate his name, and vouch him by public worship, as you may see by the first and second verses of that chapter. And this is a gospel prophecy concerning the last days; where we may take notice of the folly and pride of those who cast off public ordinances, from a pretence of their high attainments, leaving these duties of religion as strings for those that are yet children to be led by. This is horrible pride, to have such an high opinion of themselves. But were they so perfect as they falsely imagine, and needed not any farther teaching, yet ought they not still to avouch God by worshipping him? The ground from which Divine worship becomes due to God is his own infinite perfections, and our dependence on him as the author of beings and fountain of bliss. Hence it is that angels and saints in heaven worship him, though in a way suitable to their glorified state. Some ordinances, indeed, fitted to the militant church on earth, shall there cease; but a worship remains, yea, it is their constant employment. Saints on earth

Digitized by Google

serve God always, but cannot always worship, therefore they have stated times appointed them. Now to cast off the worship of God, is to renounce God himself, and communion with his church both on earth and in heaven. 'Ye are they that forsake the Lord, and forget my holy mountain,' Isa. lxv. 11. They did not give him his public worship, and he interprets this as a casting him off from being their God. Sometimes, I confess, the church doors are shut by persecutors, and when this flood is up the ways to Zion mourn; yet then we are to lament after the Lord and his ark. Holy David was no stranger to private devotions, yet he could not but bewail his banishment from the public,—'My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary,' Psa. lxiii. 1, 2. Secondly, To preserve love and unity in the church. God is one, and dearly loves oneness and unity among his people. This reason he gives why he would have the curtains of the tabernacle coupled together,—that it might be one tabernacle, Exod. xxxvi. 13, 18. The fastening of these curtains so lovingly together for this end, that the tent might be one, signified the knitting and clasping together of the saints in love. Now, though this be effected principally by the inward operation of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts, for he alone can knit souls, and knead them into one lump; yet he useth their joint communion in ordinances as a happy means, through which he may convey his grace, that fastens them in love together. These are the ligaments that tie one member to another in this mystical body. And do we not see that Christians, like members of the natural body, take care for, and sympathize with one another, so long as they are united in one communion? But when these ligaments are cut, then we see one member drops from another, and little care for, or love to each other is to be found amongst them. The apostle saw good reason to join both these in one exhortation, Heb. x. 24, 25: 'Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together;' as if he had said, If you cannot agree to worship God one with another, you will have little love one for another. When the Jews' staff of beauty was cut asunder, the staff of bands did not last long unbroken, Zech. xi. 10. Religion hath its name *a religando*, it is a strong binder; break the beautified order of church communion, and a people will soon fall to pieces. It is observable how endearing communion is in things of an inferior nature;—scholars at school together,—those that board in the same house,—twins,—they have a mutual endearment of affection towards each other. How influential then must church communion needs be, where these all meet;—when they shall consider they go to the same public school of the ministry, sit at the same table of the sacrament, suck the same breasts of ordinances, and lie together in the bosom, yea, womb of the same church! This was admirably seen in the primitive Christians, who by fellowship in ordinances were inspired with a wonderful love to one another: 'All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need: and they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,' Acts ii. 44-46; but when a breach was made in the church's communion, then love caught cold, which grew upon Christians as divisions increased. Now one would think, the cause of our disease being so easily known, the cure should not be so hard as at this day we find it. Thirdly, For the saints' safety, and defence against their enemies. Paul rejoiced at the order and stedfastness of the Colossian saints, Col. ii. 5. Order is a military word, and denotes an army compact, and cast into such a fit order, that every part is helpful to each other for its defence; and such an army are the saints, when they stand in communion together according to divine rule. Our blessed Saviour, when departing from earth to heaven, what course took he to leave his disciples in a defensive posture after he was gone? Did he send them home to look every one to himself? No, but to Jerusalem, there to stand, as it were, in a body, by joint communion, Acts i. 4. The soldier is safe when marching with the army, but not when he straggles from it. Cain looking upon himself as an excommunicated person from the church of God, expected some great evil would befall him. Therefore the gracious soul, meant by the spouse, is brought in asking, where the assembly of the faithful is, that, joining herself to

Digitized by Google

it she may be protected in time of a danger; Cant. i. 7: 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon? For why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?' Fourthly, Because of the great delight he takes in the joint prayers and praises of his people. We need not detract from the excellency of private devotions, to magnify the public prayers of the church; both are necessary and highly pleasing to God; yet it is no wrong to the private devotions of a particular saint, to give the precedency to the public prayers of the church. God himself tells us, Psa. lxxxvii. 2, he 'loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.' No doubt the prayers which the faithful put up to heaven from under their private roofs were very acceptable unto him; but if a saint's single voice in prayer be so sweet to God's ear, much more the church choir, his saints' prayers in concert together. A father is glad to see any one of his children, and makes him welcome when he visits him, but much more when they come together; the greatest feast is when they all meet at his house. The public praises of the church are the emblem of heaven itself, where all the angels make but one concert. There is a wonderful prevalency in the joint prayers of his people. When Peter was in prison, the church meets, and prays him out of his enemies' hands. A prince will grant a petition subscribed by the hands of a whole city, which may be he would not at the request of a private subject, and yet love him well too. There is an especial promise made to public prayer, Matt. xviii. 30: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' He doth not say, I will, but, 'I am there;' let them come as soon as they will, I am present by my special favour and grace, because this concord in prayer highly pleaseth me.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO QUESTIONS ABOUT PUBLIC PRAYER ANSWERED.

I SHALL now answer a question or two concerning public prayer.

SECTION I.—Whether it be lawful that the public prayers of the church be performed in a language not understood by the people? All the officers of the church, and duties performed in its worship, are to be done unto edification: now, none can be edified by what he understands not, and therefore it must be a mocking of God and man, to babble such prayers in the church as the people understand not. 'If I pray,' saith the apostle, 'in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful,' 1 Cor. xiv 14: he means the congregation are not the wiser for his understanding the prayer he puts up, except he could make them understand it also. We can no more be edified by another's intellect, than be saved by another's faith. When God intended to defeat that bold attempt of those sons of pride, who would need build a tower that should vie with the heaven for height, he did no more but confound their language, that they might not understand one another's speech; and, when it was done, presently their work ceased: and as they could not build, so neither can he edify the people that understands not his speech in prayer. A dumb minister may serve the people's turn as well as he who by his speech is not understood by them. The minister's voice is necessary in his public administrations, to explain his meaning, not that God may hear, for he hears those prayers which the tongue is not employed to express, but that the people may hear, and so join their votes with his to God. As the minister is to pray for them, so they are to pray with him, which they are to testify by their hearty 'Amen' at the close: but this they cannot do, if we believe St. Paul: 'How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?' 1 Cor. xiv. 16. 'The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth,' saith Solomon, Prov. xvi. 23; that is, he will not suffer his tongue to run before his wit, but know what he shall speak before he sends his tongue on his errand. And surely, above all, wisdom is to be shewn in our prayers, wherein we speak not to man, but to God. To say 'Amen' to that prayer which we understand not, what is it but to offer the sacrifice of fools! Holy matter in prayer is the incense to be offered; the tongue is the censer, but the affections of the devout soul bring the fire to the incense, before it can ascend as a sweet perfume into the nostrils

Digitized by Google

of God. Now, if the intellect want light to understand what the matter of the prayer is, the affections must either be cold, or wild; and wild-fire is unfit to offer up the incense of prayer with. It is not enough that the praying soul be touched with some devout affections, but that these affections be suitable to the matter of the prayer, yea, arise from the sense it hath thereof.

SECTION II.—Whether a set form of prayer be lawful to be used in the church? If it be unlawful, it is because, by the use of a set form in prayer, some command of God is transgressed; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Now it will trouble those who decry all set forms, how holy soever the matter of them be, to shew any command upon Scripture record that forbids the praying by a set form, or that disallows its use, either in express terms, or by necessary consequence. It will be granted, yea, must, that the Scripture is a perfect rule in this particular duty of God's worship, as well as in others. But among all the precepts and rules in the book of God, we find none that commands we should pray by a conceived form, and not by a set form; we are commanded who to pray,—to God, and none other, Psalm xliv. 20; in whose name we are to pray, 1 Tim. ii. 5; Eph. v. 20; we are bound up to the matter of our prayer, what we are to ask, 1 John v. 14; and, lastly, in what manner we are to pray,—we must pray with understanding, John iv. 22: 1 Cor. xiv. 16; Heb. xi. 6: in faith, James i. 6; Heb. xi. 4: with sincere fervency, Jer. xxix. 12. In a word, which comprehends all in one, we are to pray in the Spirit, Eph. vi. 18: in the Holy Ghost, Jude 20. Now he that can do all this, need not fear but he prays lawfully, and, consequently, acceptably. And we must confess this may be done by one that prayeth with a set form, or else we must very boldly charge many eminent saints in Scripture for praying unlawfully. Who dares say that Solomon praised God unlawfully, when he used the very form which David, his father, had penned? Or that Moses did not pray in the Spirit, because he prayed in a constant form at the setting forward of the ark, and at its setting down again? Thus you have seen what God hath prescribed to our praying acceptably; and if it had been of such dangerous consequence to have prayed by a set form as to make our prayers abominable, would God have omitted to warn his people of it, especially when he foresaw that his churches generally in their assemblies would make use of them, as they have done for thirteen or fourteen hundred years! But may we not rather, yea, undoubtedly we ought to conclude, that seeing the Lord in his word descends not to prescribe what the outward frame and order of our words in prayer should be, whether spoken extempore, or cast into a form beforehand, both are lawful and warrantable, the Scripture having determined neither the one nor the other; and, therefore, to put religion in one, so as to condemn the other as unlawful, looks, as a learned pen hath it, too much like superstition, seeing God himself hath laid no bond upon the conscience either way. As for the excellency of conceived prayer, wherein the devout Christian, out of the abundance of his heart pours out his request to God, none but a profane spirit dares open his mouth against it. But is there no way to magnify the excellency of that but by vilifying and imputing sin to the other? Alas! the evil is not in a form, but in formality; and that is a disease that may be found in him that prays with a conceived prayer. A man may pray without a form, and yet not pray without formality; though I confess he that binds himself constantly to a set form, especially in his private addresses, seems to me to be more in danger of the two, to fall under the power of that lazy distemper. But to despatch this question, I would desire those that scruple the lawfulness of all set forms, to look at those set forms of blessing, prayers, and thanksgiving, that are upon Scripture record, and were used by the servants of God with his approbation; and then consider whether God would prescribe or accept what is unlawful. The priest had a form of blessing the people, Numb. vi. 23. Moses used, as I hinted, a form of prayer at the removal of the ark,—'Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee:' and when it was set down another form, 'Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel,' Numb. x. 35, 36, which very form was continued and used by David, Psalm lxviii. 1. Asaph and his brethren had set forms of thanksgiving to use in their public service, 1 Chron. xvi. 7: 'On that day David delivered first this Psalm to thank the Lord into the hands of Asaph

Digitized by Google

and his brethren.' This was the first he appointed to be sung in the public service, the several parts whereof were afterward much enlarged, as you may see by comparing the 105th Psalm with the former part of the song in the place fore-quoted, and Psalm cxvi., with the latter part of it. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon used the very form of words in praising God which his father had penned. Good Hezekiah commands the 'Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David,' 2 Chron. xxix. 30. This holy man, no doubt, was able to have poured forth extemporary praises, as it is thought he did in that prayer which he on the sudden put up on the occasion of that railing letter sent him, 2 Kings xix. 14; yet he did not think it unlawful to use a form in this public administration. Yea, our blessed Saviour, an instance beyond all, both gave a form of prayer to his disciples, and himself disdained not to pray three several times, one after another, the very same form of words, Matt. xxvi. 44: 'He left them, and went again and prayed the third time, saying the same words.' And that hymn which he sang with his disciples, is conceived by the learned to be that portion of Psalms which the Jews used at the celebration of the Passover; see Beza and Gerhard Harmo, *in locum*.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THIS HEAD OF PUBLIC PRAYER BRIEFLY IMPROVED.

I COME now to the fifth thing propounded, and that is applicatory.

SECTION I.—This shews what reason the people of God have to pray for good magistrates, especially kings and princes. As the inn is to the traveller, so kingdoms are to the church in its pilgrimage here on earth. Pray 'for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,' 1 Tim. ii. 2. By godliness, he means in an especial manner the free profession of the truth, and the public exercise of God's pure worship. No magistrate can hinder the saints' living godly, as to the embracing of the truth in their hearts, and secret performance of prayer. Daniel would and could pray, though Nebuchadnezzar should do his worst. But princes carry the keys of the church doors at their girdles, and can shut or open them. When faithful magistrates sway the sceptre, then the ways to Zion are easy and open: when enemies to the ways and worship of God bear rule, then the saints mourn, church doors are shut, and prison doors opened to the servants of Christ; then the woman flies into the wilderness, and the church into private chambers, as we find in the apostles' days, when the church was met with the doors shut to pray for Peter. O, pray for kings and princes! for as they carry the keys of the church doors, so God carries the key that opens the doors of their hearts.

SECTION II.—It reproves those that turn their backs on public worship. Now, they are of two sorts:

First, The irreligious atheist,—such as, out of a profane spirit, turn their back on the public worship of God. The Jews have a saying,—he that dwells in a city where there is a synagogue, and comes not to prayer there, is the person that deserves the name of a bad neighbour. How many bad neighbours do we live among, who are seldom seen in the public assembly from year to year! Many live as if they had rent the bond that was sealed at their baptism, and renounced all homage to their Maker, and would tell the world they owe him no worship. They are worse brutes than the hog in his sty, or the horse in his stable. They were made for our use, and accordingly serve us: man was intended for the service of his Maker, a creature made for religion, by which some would define the human nature from that of brutes, rather than by his rational faculty: indeed, in some brutes there is a sagacity that looks something like man's discursive faculty; but religion is a thing their nature is wholly incapable of, and therefore nothing makes man so truly a brute as irreligion. The Jewish Talmud propounds this question, Why God made man? and gives this as one reason. God made man on the evening just before the sabbath, that he might forthwith enter upon the observation of the command to sanctify the sabbath, and begin his life, as it were, with the worship of God, which was the chief end why it was given him. May we not therefore wonder at the patience of God in suffering these ungodly wretches to live, that, by casting this horrid contempt

Digitized by Google

upon his worship, walk contrary to the very end of their creation? If the bells which call us to the worship of God were to give them notice of a drunken wake, O how soon should we have them flock together! What should we impute this irreligion of multitudes amongst us to? Surely it proceeds from a criminal conscience. It is said of Cain, 'He went out from the presence of the Lord,' Gen. iv. 16; that is, say some interpreters on that place, where God had his church and worship, there God is especially present. Guilt, indeed, makes men afraid of God. This makes them do what they can to wear off the thoughts of a Deity, which are so troublesome to their consciences; now to do this, they have no other way than to shun those duties which will bring God and their sins to their remembrance. Herod was soon persuaded to cut off that head whose tongue was so bold to tell him his faults: and profane hearts are easily drawn to cast off those duties which will gall their sore consciences. But that man is in a miserable case that knows no way to get ease, but by throwing away the plaster that must heal his wound. Ah! poor wretches! this will not serve your turn. What though the prisoner stops his ears, and will not hear the judge pronounce the sentence against him, will that save him from the gallows? Surely no, but rather procure his being sent thither the sooner, for his contempt of the court, who, had he humbled himself, might possibly have got the sentence reversed. Whether sinners will come to his worship or no, God will proceed in his work. Turning thy back on his worship is not the way to prevent, but hasten Divine vengeance. How much better were it to make thy humble supplication to thy Judge, and wait at the posts of wisdom! While men, though bad, wait on ordinances, there is hope, for they are under the means; but when they cast them off, then their ruin hastens. Secondly, Scrupulous separatists, who do not absent themselves from the public worship out of a profane, atheistical spirit as the former, but from some scruples, whether they may lawfully be present at the prayers there put up, because there are some mal-administrations in the performance of it, or, at least, what they think to be such; at these they are displeased, and so withdraw; maybe it is because the duty of prayer is performed with a set form, which they conceive unlawful. This I shall waive, having spoken already to it. Or may be it is not a form, but some passages in the form used that offends them, and therefore they dare not be present. So that the question will be,—Whether it be lawful to be present at that service, or those prayers in the congregation that have something faulty in them? In order to answer this, first, we must distinguish of faults: all are not of a size; there are faults in the matter, and faults in the method, of prayer; and faults in the matter may be either fundamental, or of a less nature, such as are not fundamental, or bordering therepon; may be generally dispersed through the prayer, so that it is soured throughout with them, or only in some particular passages. Secondly, We must distinguish between approving of the faults in a prayer, and being present at the service of God, where some things are done faultily. I answer, that it is lawful to be present at those prayers, where some things may be supposed to be faulty in outward form, yea, and also in matter, in things not fundamental, nor bordering thereupon, and these not dispersed through the whole body of the prayers, but in some passages only. We may be present, where God is present by his grace and favour. We may follow the Lamb safely wherever he goes. Now, God doth not for corruptions of doctrine, that are remote from the foundation, or of worship, in things ritual, and of an inferior nature, cast off a church, and withdraw his presence from it; neither ought we. Indeed, if the foundation of doctrine be destroyed, and the worship become idolatrous, in that case God goes before us, and calls all the faithful after him to come out from the communion of such a church. But where corruptions in a church are of the former nature, and such laws be not imposed by the church in their communion with it, as bring a necessity of approving things unlawful, the sin is not in holding communion with it, but in withdrawing from it. Many things may be tolerated for maintaining peace and unity, and enjoying the worship of God, when it is not in our power to redress them. Neither doth our presence at the ordinance carry a consent with it of all that is there done. Who ever said, that all who are present in an assembly, by it shew their consent to every impertinent phrase in the minister's prayer, corrupt gloss, or false interpretation he makes of any text! If this were true, our Saviour

Digitized by Google

led the people into a snare, when he bade them beware of the leaven of the Pharisees' doctrine, yet bade them hear them preach, Matt. xxiii. 3.

SECTION III.—Of exhortations. First, Make conscience of joining with the church in her public worship. Do not think thou art left to thy liberty whether thou wilt or not, but bind it upon thy conscience as a duty, for so indeed it is. You think it is the minister's duty to dispense ordinances, surely then it is your duty to attend on them. He might as well pray for you at home, as come to church, and not find you there. Is there a woe to him if he doth not provide food for your souls, and none to you if you come not to partake of it? And think not you are time enough there, if you hear the sermon, though you miss the prayers, which should prepare you for the word, and sanctify the word to you. It is not the way to profit by one ordinance, to neglect another. The minister may preach, but God must teach thee to profit. If God opens not thy understanding to conceive of, and thy heart to conceive by the word thou hearest, no fruit will come of it. Now prayer is the key to open God's heart, as his Spirit is the key to open thine. Secondly, Take heed how thou comest to, and behavest thyself in prayer.

First, How thou comest to public worship. Take heed thou comest not in thy filthiness: I mean, that thou regard not iniquity in thy heart. Wash, and then pray; so David resolves, 'I will wash my hands in innocency, and so compass thine altar,' alluding to the priests that went to the laver before they approached with their sacrifice to the altar, Exod. xl. 31. It was counted a great presumption in one, that he durst come near his prince with a foul breath; O, what a bold act then it is, to draw near to the great God with any sin upon thee! This is sure to make thy breath in prayer loathsome, and render thee abominable to him. Secondly, How thou behavest thyself in thy duty; be sure it be with a holy reverence.

First, With an inward reverence. God is called the *fear* of his people, because he is reverenced by them in their approaches to him. Fear is put for the whole worship of God, because no part of it is to be done without a holy trembling; this, as the grace-note to the music, gives a beauty and acceptableness both to our prayers and praises; 'Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.' Labour to set up a right notion of God in thy mind, as infinitely glorious in holiness, majesty, and power. Irreverance is the product of low thoughts of a person, which makes it impossible that an ignorant soul should truly reverence God, because he knows not what God is. A prince in a disguise is not known, and therefore not entertained where he comes, as when he appears in his royal majesty. The saints used to awe their hearts into a reverence of God in prayer, by revolving his titles of majesty in their thoughts, Psa. lxxix. 6. Secondly, Outward reverence. God is a Spirit, yet he will have the reverence of our body as well as Spirit, for both are his; and especially in public. A prince would not like rude behaviour from his servant in his bed-chamber, where none besides himself is witness to it; but much less will he bear it as he sits on his throne before many of his subjects. Now the fittest gesture of body in public prayer, to express our reverence, is kneeling: 'Come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord,' Psa. xcv. 6. So Paul, taking his leave of the elders of Ephesus, kneeled and prayed with them all, Acts xx. 36. And all the Christians at Tyrus, accompanying Paul to the ship, with their wives and children, 'Kneeled down on the shore and prayed,' Acts xxi. 5. Where that cannot be done, they should stand, if debility of nature hinder not: as for sitting, we do not find it commended in Scripture, as a praying posture; neither have the churches of Christ judged it so. Tertullian saith, that to pray sitting is not according to the church's order: as for the passage, 2 Sam. vii. 18, 'David sat before the Lord,' it may be read, he abode or stayed before the Lord: so the word in other places is taken; as Gen. xxvii. 44; Lev. xliv. 8; 1 Sam. i. 22. Thirdly, attention and intention of mind, that they may go along with the minister by their devout affections, and witness their consent to the prayers put up, with their hearty Amen, 1 Chron. xvi. 36; Nehem. viii 6; 1 Cor. xiv. 16: or else, indeed, they are as a broken string in a concert, that speaks not with the rest, and thereby discomposeth the harmony.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XLV.

OF EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER, ITS NATURE, AND BY WHOM TO BE PERFORMED.

The last sort of prayer is *extraordinary prayer;* for the despatch of which I shall answer five questions:—What is extraordinary prayer?

SECTION I.—Prayer may be called extraordinary in a double respect. First, In regard of the time set apart for the performance of it: it is extraordinary when some more than ordinary portion of our time is set apart for the work. Thus we find Jacob wrestling till break of day, Gen. xxxii. 24; and Joshua with the elders of Israel till even-tide; the one probably spending the night, the other the day, in this duty: and Israel, in their war with Benjamin, 'wept before the Lord until even,' Judges xx. 23. We also find Daniel many days together in prayer, Dan. x. 2. Secondly, In regard of its adjunct. Then prayer is extraordinary when fasting is joined to the duty of prayer. Now, fasting is a religious abstinence, whereby we forbear the use of all earthly comforts in the time set apart for this duty (so far as necessity and decency will permit), the more to afflict our souls, and enforce our prayers.

First, A forbearance of food, whether meat or drink, (Esther iv. 16; Jonah iii. 7:) from this, the whole action is called a fast, which imports not a sober use of food, for this we are at all times bound to observe, but a total abstinence, if necessity of nature, through some infirmity, doth not require otherwise; for, in this case the less duty must yield to the greater: the end of fasting being to help us in prayer, which it doth not when nature faints under it; for the soul cannot fly if the wings of our bodily spirits flag. Secondly, All costly apparel, and ornaments of the body, on a fast-day, do no better than a light trimming on a mourning suit, Exod. xxxiii. 4: 'They mourned, and no man put on his ornaments;' and this by God's command, ver. 5: 'For the Lord had said to Moses, Say unto the children of Israel,—that they put off their ornaments.' In a word, all carnal mirth, music, perfumes, and whatever may recreate and delight the senses, are to be forborne upon this extraordinary occasion, see Dan. vi. 18, and x. 2, 3: for though abstinence from food, with the other severities imposed on the outward man, be not in themselves acts of worship, nor intrinsical to the nature of prayer, yet they are required in extraordinary performance of this duty by way of adjuvancy to it, and they have a reference to spiritual ends.

First, By this abstinence we acknowledge our unworthiness to enjoy such comforts, and that God may justly take from us what for a time we voluntarily deny ourselves of. Secondly, We express by our outward abstinence and fasting, the strength and vehemency of those inward affections which are to be exerted in extraordinary prayer. Men use to signify the violent passions of their soul, by forbearing the repast and delights of the body. Is it a passion of grief one is oppressed with? You will see him often forsake his food; thus David, Psa. cii. 4: 'My heart is smitten, and withered like grass, so that I forget to eat my bread.' Is it fear that possesseth the heart, with the apprehension of some great danger approaching? You will have such a one refuse his wonted repast: so the mariners in the storm, Acts xxvii. 33. Is it anger that vexeth a man? Ahab was in a violent passion upon the denial of Naboth's vineyard, and he threw himself on his bed, and would not eat, 1 Kings xxi. 4. Is it the desire of accomplishing any great design that the head and heart are taken up and transported with? Such a one will not allow himself time for his meal: 'Cursed be the man,' saith Saul, 'that eateth any bread until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies,' 1 Sam. xiv. 24. We find the smith (Isa. xliv. 12), so earnest at his idolatrous work, that he pinched himself with hunger, and would not eat, though his strength failed,—nor drink, though he was ready to faint. Now, in extraordinary prayer, the Christian is to have all these affections in a spiritual manner, wound up to the highest key possible; he is to have a deep sorrow for sin, fear and trembling at the judgments of God; a holy anger against sin, with a vehement desire to be revenged on it for the dishonour it hath cast upon God; and a longing desire to that peace with God, and the enjoyment of his favour, which sin hath deprived him of. Now, because the excess of natural passion discovers itself in this way, even to afflict their very bodies, and makes them deny themselves that which nature most craves, therefore God will have

Digitized by Google

his people, in their extraordinary humiliations, do the same, that nature may not put grace to shame. Thirdly, By this abstinence, especially from food, we tame and subdue our wanton flesh, and so have a greater advantage for mortifying those sensual lusts which receive the fuel that feeds and inflames them. A full body is a mellow soil for such lusts to grow rank in. If the body be kept high, carnal lusts will not be easily kept low. What else made Paul keep down his body by fasting and watching, which he did often, but that he might have the fuller blow at those lusts that received strength from it? Indeed, a pampered horse is most likely to cast his rider. And the Holy Spirit using the body as well as the soul in the work, this bridle of fasting is of excellent use to curb it. Fourthly, This abstinence from food is required to sharpen our spirits, and enliven the powers of the soul in this duty, which are pressed down with the charge of the stomach. A full body makes heavy eyes and drowsy spirits, and what can then be expected but yawning prayers, especially when we are to continue longer than ordinary at the work?

SECTION II.—Who are they that are called to the practice of this duty of extraordinary prayer? The command comprehends all that by age are enabled to understand the nature of this duty, when any extraordinary occasion occurs for the performance of the same. We find it required of a church and nation. It is the magistrate's duty, when there is a national cause, to call his subjects to the public practice of it (Joel ii. 15; Nehem. ix. 1), and he that refuses his call thereunto, makes himself an offender both to God and man, Lev. xxiii. 29. It reacheth to private families, Esther and her maidens keep a religious fast together, Esther iv. 16; yea, it is a duty bound upon single persons, and reacheth to the closet, Matt. vi. 17, 18: 'But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret.' The circumstances of the place shew that it is meant of a secret fast in the closet. We have them altogether in one place; Zech. xii. 12: 'The land shall mourn;' that is, there shall be a national fast: 'Every family apart, the house of David apart,' and 'the house of Nathan apart,' &c.—the fast shall be domestic: 'and their wives apart;' that is, a personal secret fast in the closet. But is not this extraordinary prayer and fasting too austere and rigid a duty for gospel times? Where doth Christ command his people in gospel times to macerate their bodies with such severities as these? Joy and praise better becomes the freedom and liberty of the gospel. Such wild stuff hath been invented by some in our loose times. These are a new sort of saints, which the world hath hardly been acquainted with before these unhappy days of ours: they would be in heaven before their time, and leave no tears upon their cheeks for Christ, at death, to wipe away. If any of these could live without sin and suffering, they would have some colour for their plea; though even then, being yet in the body, they should owe those tears to their brethren which they need not drop for themselves. The apostle bids us 'weep with those that weep, and mourn with those that mourn.' Thus did Nehemiah fast for his afflicted brethren in Jerusalem, when his own affairs were prosperous enough, being surrounded with the beams of the Persian emperor's favour. But there are none in mortal flesh free from sin, or exempted from sorrow; and therefore a mourning habit may sometimes become the best of saints on earth. 'They that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses,' Matt. xi. 8. Glorified saints, who dwell in the King of heaven's court, are always clad with joy; but this on earth is the saint's holiday suit; as he hath now and then his rejoicing days, so he wants not his days for mourning. 'The days will come,' saith our Saviour of his disciples, 'when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast,' Matt. ix. 15; and surely they lived in gospel times. If these merry professors had been with Paul, to see how he mortified his body and chastised himself with fasting, they surely would have chid him, and thought him ignorant of his Christian liberty. The worst I wish these deluded souls is, that they who are so much for joy here, may meet with no mourning in another world. It is but an ill sign, when men quarrel with a duty for its strictness, and slip the yoke off their necks because the wanton flesh says it is uneasy. These are like Ephraim, whom the prophet compares to an heifer that loveth to tread the corn but not to plough, which is hard, hungry work. A thanksgiving day, that brings a feast with it, this they like, and are content it should pass for a gospel

Digitized by Google

duty; but a day of prayer and fasting, wherein they are to pinch themselves a little, this will not go down. But is there no feast except that which goes down the throat, and satisfies hunger? Certainly this blessed duty deserves not the ill name it hath given unto it by men of sensual spirits. It is indeed to carnal wretches a heavy yoke. As the milch kine that carried the ark went bellowing for their calves that were taken from them, so do these in a fast day after their employments and enjoyments of the world, which for that time they are deprived of. Alas! poor creatures, as the ark was nothing but a burden to the kine, so the duty is no other to them. But the true saint, that knows what ease his poor heart feels in exonerating his conscience by humble confession of sin, what sweet satisfaction his soul meets with in communion with God, and what faith and inward peace he carries away with him from the duty, will give you another character of this ordinance: he will tell you he had rather be fasting with God, than feasting at a king's table. What saint had not rather be fasting on the mount with Moses, than eating and playing with the carnal Israelites below the hill? Who would not miss a meal for his body, to satiate his soul with those delights which the presence of God in such an ordinance affords? Who would not take pleasure in mourning and weeping for sin, to have the tears he sheds dried up with kisses from his Saviour's lips? It is indeed to him that attends only to the external part of the duty, a dry, sapless service, but to the saint, who drinks full draughts of the love of God, it is a most sweet soul-ravishing ordinance. The lower, exterior part of the duty, like the bottom of Jacob's ladder, stands on the earth, and leaves the creature on the earth also, for bodily exercise profits little; but the top and spiritual part of it reacheth to heaven, and mounts the gracious soul thither, even unto besom communion with God. There is as much difference between a saint and a carnal soul in this duty, as there is between a thief locked up with his keeper in a prison, and a scholar locking up himself in his study, to read some book that he is greatly delighted with; to the one it is a grievous burden, to the other an incomparable pleasure.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SEASONS FOR EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER.

WHAT are these special seasons wherein the Christian is to practise this duty of extraordinary prayer? First, In general, any extraordinary occasion, as it occurreth in the course of providence in the Christian's life. This kind of prayer is not of constant use, as ordinary prayer is: the latter is food: the former, physic; and it were absurd to be taking physic all the year long: which shews the folly of the Papists in their fasts, which are holden at set times, whether affairs be prosperous or not, ordinary or extraordinary; but I would not be thought to speak against set fasts. We shall instance a few special seasons, wherein the Christian hath a fit occasion to make use of this extraordinary duty.

SECTION I.—When he is to set upon any extraordinary enterprize, wherein he may meet with great difficulty or danger, and the issue whereof will be a great mercy or affliction. Now is a fit season to take up this duty, as an excellent means whereby all mountains of intervening difficulties may be levelled, and his undertaking crowned with happy success. Thus Esther, before she adventured upon that heroic attempt of going uncalled into the king's presence, an action that carried death and danger on the face of it, to beg the life of her people, who were given up to butchery and slaughter by the king's seal, at bloody Haman's request, first goes to God by fasting and prayer, and gets all the auxiliary forces of others' prayers she can; and, attended with this convoy, she, against the Persian law, presents herself before the king, and succeeds; for, instead of losing her own life, which was forfeited by the law for this attempt, she reverseth the unjust judgment passed upon the life of her people, and recoils it upon the head of him that laid the plot. Prayer had so unlocked and opened the king's heart, that she had what she asked at his hands. There is no such engine to facilitate and carry on any great design, as extraordinary prayer. Who could have believed that Ezra and his company of pilgrims should all get safe from Babylon to Jerusalem, being so generally hated everywhere? Now, what stratagem doth this leader of his people use to secure his passage and

Digitized by Google

escape the fury of his enemies? Doth he desire a band of the Persian king to be their guard? No; he hath gloried so much in that God whom they served, that he is ashamed the king should think he was not willing to cast himself upon his protection; but he goes to fasting and prayer, Ezra viii. 21; then they take their march, and find the way all along cleared before them, verse 31. Christ hath sanctified this duty for this end in his own holy example, who, when the Twelve went forth to preach the gospel, that they may succeed the better in their embassy, he sends them under the protection of prayer, and to that end spends the preceding night himself in the exercise of that duty, Luke vi. 12, 13. Now, though every Christian is not called forth to such great and public enterprises as some others are, yet if he will observe the several passages of his more private employments, and turns of providence in the course of his life, he shall find many such actions occur as give him a fair hint to make use of this duty. Haply thou art to enter upon a calling, or in the calling thou art met with many difficulties and temptations. Thou hast a long journey or dangerous voyage to take; thou hast to do with a subtle, potent adversary; though thy cause be good, yet thou art likely to be outwitted or overborne. Here is a fair errand put into thy mouth to go before the Lord for counsel, assistance, and protection. May be thou hast children, and these are to be disposed of into callings or new relations: will not the issue that depends upon this great change of their condition lay the foundation of much grief or joy to thee? Yet how light these things are treated by many! as if the marriage of a child were of little more importance than the selling of a horse or cow at a fair! Heaven, alas! is seldom consulted in these marriages, I mean, by solemn prayer engaging God in the business. Abraham's servant puts many parents to shame; he earnestly prayed for success in his journey when sent to take a wife for his master's son; and not a prayer from them for their children. But I wonder not that they who propound low and carnal ends to themselves in such enterprises, should forget by prayer both to ask God's counsel in the match, or invite his blessing at the wedding.

Section II.—When the Christian is in the dark concerning any truth, and cannot satisfy his judgment by the humble and diligent inquiry which he hath made after it, now is a fit season to take up this extraordinary duty as an excellent means to be led into the knowledge of the mind of God therein. Prayer is the proper key to unlock God's heart, and he alone can open our understandings. This course Daniel took, and got more understanding by his fasting and prayer than by all his study; for a messenger is sent from heaven to give him skill and understanding, Dan. ix. 20—23, and again, chap. x. 12. And the angel is careful to let him know that it was his extraordinary praying that procured this extraordinary favour, and also how acceptable his prayer was, by the easy access and quick dispatch it found with God; and therefore tells him that he had no sooner set upon this course of afflicting his soul, but he was heard, and the messenger ordered to give him an answer to his prayer. Surely, prayer hath not lost its credit in heaven, but is now as welcome to God as ever: and though an angel be not the messenger to bring the saint an answer, yet he shall have it by as sure and more honourable hand, even the Holy Spirit, whose office is to lead his people into truth. Thus Cornelius, Acts x., came to be instructed in the mystery of the gospel upon his extraordinary seeking of God by fasting and prayer. It is very probable this good man, in those divided times, wherein he saw many zealous for the old way of Jewish worship, and others preach up a new way, stood in some doubt, and consequently was induced, by fasting and prayer, to ask counsel of God to direct him in the way of truth, as may seem by the tenor of the message sent him from God in the vision while he was at prayer, which bade him send to Joppa 'for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do,' ver. 5, 6. And in our divided times, wherein there is so much difference of judgment, had there been less wrangling among ourselves, and more wrestling with God for his Spirit, we had been in a fairer way to find the door of truth, which so many are yet groping for. The way of controversy is dusty, and contentious disputes raiseth this dust, and blows it most into their eyes that gallop fastest in it, so that they miss the truth, which humble souls find upon their knees at the throne of grace. When the disciples were quarrelling, then they got nothing

Digitized by Google

from Christ but a chiding, Luke xii. 14, &c.; but when they were praying together earnestly, then he sent his Spirit to teach them, Acts ii.

SECTION III.—When the Christian is under any great affliction. Now is a fit season, if he is able for the work: 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray,' James v. 13; that is, let him then be more than ordinary in this duty; for he must, yea, will, if a Christian, pray when he is not afflicted: but the meaning is, he must now pray after an extraordinary manner; he must now pray with more vehemency; for though in all our addresses to God we are to express the lively workings of our hearts to God, without which our prayers are unsavoury, yet God expects, and it hath been always the care of holy men, in their extraordinary applications to this duty of prayer to wind up their affections to a pitch higher than ordinary. Look upon them in some great strait and affliction, and you shall find them exceeding themselves, and evincing a princely spirit: so Jacob behaved himself in prayer, Gen. xxxii. 23; as a prince fighting in the field for his crown and kingdom, he wrestled with the angel, who was no other than God himself; that is, he strained, as it were, every vein in his heart, and put forth his whole might in prayer, as a wrestler would do that grappled with a potent adversary. Moses is so transported with zeal for Israel, when a dismal cloud of wrath threatened them for their idolatry, that he offers rather to die upon the place, than to go down the Mount, and not carry the joyful news of pardon with him, Exod. xxxii. 32. And Nehemiah, when he had been afflicting his soul, and praying before the Lord, it was with such vehemency that the anguish of his spirit looked out at his eyes, and left a mark of sorrow upon his very countenance which his prince could observe as he waited on him. Again, in affliction we are called to pray, as more intensively, so more extensively; I mean, longer and oftener. Thus our Saviour spent more time than ordinary in it. Thrice, one after another, we find him at it, Matt. xxvi. 44. His agony was great, and the waves of his affliction violent; and therefore he doubles, yea, trebles, his prayer, with deep sighs and strong cries to his Father. Nature never strains so to its utmost as when it is oppressed; then temples work, lungs heave, and heart pants; so in affliction the spirit of prayer should be increased and extended.

SECTION IV.—When the Christian is buffeted with any temptation, or overpowered with a corruption, and cannot with the use of ordinary means quench the one or mortify the other. If the short dagger of ordinary prayer will not reach the heart of a lust, then it is time to draw out this long sword of extraordinary prayer upon it. There is a kind of devils, our Saviour tells us, that goeth not out but by prayer and fasting, Matt. xvii. 21. You know the occasion of this speech was that complaint of one concerning his lunatic son; 'I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.' Thus some poor souls complain that they have come to the word in their daily prayers, begged power over such a lust, resolved against it many a time, and none of these means cure it; what can they now do more? Here thou art told: bring thy condition to Christ in this solemn ordinance of prayer and fasting; this hath been the happy means of strengthening many a poor Christian to be avenged on those spiritual enemies which have outbraved all the former, and like Samson, to pull down the devil's house upon his head.

SECTION V.—When sin abounds more than ordinary in the times we live in. Sinning times have ever been the saints' praying times: this sent Ezra with a heavy heart to confess the sin of his people, and to bewail their abominations before the Lord, chap. ix. And Jeremiah tells the wicked of his degenerate age that his 'soul should weep in secret places for their pride,' Jer. xiii. 17. Indeed, sometimes sin comes to such a height that this is almost all the godly can do, to get into a corner, and bewail the general pollutions of the age. 'If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?' Psa. xi. 3. Such dismal days of national confusion our eyes have seen, when foundations of government were destroyed, and all hurled into military confusion. When it is thus with a people, what can the righteous do? Yes, this they may, and should do, 'fast and pray.' There is yet a God in heaven to be sought to, when a people's deliverance is thrown beyond the help of human policy or power. Now is the fit time to make their appeal to God, as the words following hint, ver. 4: 'The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven;' in

Digitized by Google

which words, God is presented sitting in heaven as a temple, for their encouragement, I conceive, in such a desperate state of affairs, to direct their prayers thither for deliverance. And certainly this hath been the engine that hath been instrumental, above any, to restore this poor nation again, and set it upon the foundation of that lawful government from which it had so dangerously departed.

SECTION VI.—Times of great expectation are times for extraordinary prayer. When the people of God have been big with expectation of great mercies approaching, then have they been more abounding in prayer. As the cocks crow oftenest toward break of day, so the saints, the nearer they have apprehended the accomplishment of promises made to the church, the more urgent are they in prayer. When a woman is near her accouchment, then she desires her midwife to be at hand. 'The children are come to the birth,' said good Hezekiah, and then he desires the help of the prophet's prayer for the fair delivery of them: 'Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left,' Isa. xxxvii. 3, 4. When Daniel had learned that the happy period of the seventy years' captivity was now at hand, chap. ix. 2, then in an extraordinary manner he sets himself to pray and afflict his soul before the Lord. And we have reason to hope that spiritual Babylon (Rome, I mean), is not longlived; it is high time, therefore, that the saints should fall more earnestly than ever to dig her grave by their prayers.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WHY EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER IS TO BE SUPERADDED TO ORDINARY.

BUT why is extraordinary prayer to be superadded by the Christian to his ordinary exercise of it? First, In obedience to the command of God. He commands not only that we should 'pray always,' but 'with all prayer' also; and extraordinary prayer is one kind amongst the rest; therefore let none of us say, Is it not enough to pray once or twice every day? We must, upon some occasions, devote a whole day to this duty, even to the neglect of everything else. O what niggards would some be toward God, were they left free to devote what time they thought fit for his worship! This cavil sounds like that of Judas, 'To what purpose is this waste? for this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. But this he said, not that he loved the poor, but because he was a thief.' Truly, when I hear some carnal wretches cry out against this waste of time in praying and fasting,—how much might the improvement of that time, if laid out in their callings, have benefited their families!—I am ready to think it is not because they have such care of their relations as they pretend, for they who grudge a day for prayer, can throw many away at the ale-house, or in idleness; but they carry thievish hearts in their bosoms, which love to rob God of his due, and care not how little service they put him off with. Is he a loyal subject that pays the ordinary tribute to his prince, but if occasion of state requires a subsidy, this he refuseth, or doth it reluctantly? God's commands are none of them so grievous that any should need to grumble under them. Those yokes (duties and commands, I mean), whose outsides seem most hard, have the softest lining within. What seems harder than suffering? And yet when are saints more full of heaven's joy? What duty more austere than this of fasting and afflicting our souls? And yet in the breast of this lion, that scares sensual wretches, the Christian finds the sweetest honeycomb of inward comforts. Temple work is sure to be well paid if well done; though it be never so little work in his house, God will not have it done gratis; none shall kindle a fire on his altar for nought; and therefore he takes it in great disdain at their hands who say, 'What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' Mal. iii. 14. Whereas the fault was not in the duty, but in themselves, that they got no more by it: as if a wicked servant should bring himself, by his riot and excess, to poverty, and then give out that a hard master hath undone him. Secondly, To comport with the providence of God, by a suitable return of duty to his actions and dispensations toward us. When God is extraordinary in his providence, he expects his people should be more than ordinary in seeking him; what else means this scripture,—'This will I do unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel?' Amos iv. 12. Here God alarms

Digitized by Google

them by his extraordinary proceedings intended against them, to take the hint, and apply themselves to the solemn practice of repentance, and humbling of their souls, as a suitable posture to meet God in, and keep off the storm of his wrath. Is it not high time for a nation to betake themselves to their defensive arms, when a mighty host is marching against them? So Isaiah xxvi. 20, 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee,' &c. Here he sends his people to their chambers, that they may, by afflicting their souls, and fervent prayers, finding a hiding-place in the day of his indignation; and why?—verse 21, 'For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.' The rising of God out of his place imports that he is about to perform some notable enterprise; and when the master riseth, it is not proper for the servant to sit still, but to rise also, and prepare to follow him where he goes. God takes special notice how we behave ourselves, and comport with his dispensations of judgment or mercy, Isaiah xxii. 12: 'In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning;' that is, he called them by the voice of his providence, as well as his prophets, the nature of which was such, that, had not their lusts stopped up their ears, and made them deaf, they could not but hear and understand, and that was the time, if ever, when God expected to see them in sackcloth and tears, humbling their souls before him. Now see how he looks upon their security and profane slighting of his providence, verse 14: 'And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts.' Few sins provoke God more than this, Psalm xxviii. 5: 'Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.' So Dan. v. 22: 'And thou, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this:' this lost him his life and kingdom, as the contrary saved Ahab's for a time, though it was not so sincere as it ought: a temporal humiliation got him a temporal benefit. Thirdly, For the great influence that this extraordinary duty, solemnly performed, would have upon our whole life. To keep the body healthful, requires not only daily food, but now and then physic; for in the soundest constitution, with the best care and temperance, there will in time such a quantity of superfluous humours gather, that nature, without help, cannot digest: and truly the temper of the soul is as infirm, and needs as much attention as the body. Ordinary prayer is the saint's food; he can as little miss the constant returns of it as his usual meals. But extraordinary prayer is his physic, to clear and discharge the soul of those distempers which it contracts, and cannot conquer by the use of ordinary means; as also to advance and heighten the Christian graces unto a farther degree of strength and activity. As God hath in his wise providence ordered one star of great influence to be at a certain season of the year in conjunction with the sun, for the more effectual ripening the harvest in these colder parts of the world; so hath he in the same wisdom appointed, for the Christian's spiritual advantage and help in this cold climate of the world, that this solemn duty should now and then be taken into conjunction with our ordinary exercise of devotion, for want of which it is that many ripen slower, both in their graces and comforts, than some of their fellow-saints who sit often under the influences of this quickening ordinance.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DIRECTIONS TO THE PERFORMING EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER.

WHAT direction may be given to the acceptable and successful performance of this solemn duty?

I come now to close my discourse on this point, in answering this last question: a serious necessary one it is, for indeed it is an edge-tool of excellent use, but dangerous in his hand that knows not how to use it; like some physic, if it doth not purge, it poisons. In the same fat soil where the corn is best, the weeds are rankest. Neither grace nor sin grow to such a height anywhere as in those that converse much with this solemn ordinance. Therefore, as they who are in a ship upon a swift stream had need the more to look to the steerage of it, because they will be either carried rapidly to their port, or be wrecked; so

Digitized by Google

have they reason to be very careful in the management of this service, the issue whereof cannot be ordinary, because the duty is extraordinary. Now the counsel to be given must be divided into three general heads: something should be directed as preparatory to this undertaking; something to be observed in its performance; and also after the despatch of it. The city cannot be safe unless the whole line be kept; it is all one whether the enemy breaks in at the front, flank, or rear of an army. First, Some preparatory direction before the duty. Now, there is a double preparation requisite, habitual and actual. There is a remote and habitual preparation of great use to the performance of this solemn duty, and it lies in this:—To look, Christian, that thou shewest a conscionable care in thy daily walking, and the constant exercise of this duty in thy ordinary daily offices of devotion, or else thou art likely to make but bad work when thou comest to engage in the extraordinary. First, Thy neglect in the ordinary duty will exceedingly indispose thee for extraordinary. In extraordinary prayer the soul is to be put on her full speed, all its powers to be strained to their utmost ability, and to continue long in the work. Is he fit for so swift and long a race whose soul is not kept in breath by the daily exercise of ordinary prayer, but lets his graces, if he hath any, be choked up with sloth or formarlity? The more any member is used, the stronger it is; the right hand, which is our working-hand, hath more activity than the left, that is used less. A weakness will certainly invade the powers of thy lazy soul, which, though thou perceivest not as thou sittest in thy chair of sloth, will appear when thou risest and thinkest to go forth in any solemn duty as thou wert wont to do; then thou wilt find with Samson, that thou hast lost thy strength in the lap of sloth and negligence. A weak soul is as unfit for the exercise of extraordinary prayer as a slothful one; and the only way to gain strength in order to its due performance, is not to neglect the ordinary duty. Secondly, As it will indispose thee for this solemn duty, so it is a bad symptom concerning thy spiritual state itself. Grace works uniformly, and discovers a comely proportion in its actions. Perhaps you may see the son of a prince on some high day in richer and more glorious apparel than on another; but you shall never find him in beggarly clothes; still he will be clad as becomes a king's son. Possibly you may see the Christian come forth in an extraordinary duty with more enlargement of affections in prayer, and all his graces raised to a higher glory than ordinary; but you shall never find him with his grace laid aside; still the true saint will declare his high birth by his everyday course; he will not live in the neglect of ordinary duties, and cast off communion with God in his daily walking. It is the brand of an hypocrite to have his devotion come by fits; to seem, for zeal, like an angel at one time, and live like an atheist at another. Surely grace is never so unlike itself. It is ill living in that miser's house who hath never any good meat on his table but when he makes a feast, and that is very seldom; or with him that upon an occasion hath a day of prayer, but starves himself and family in their daily fare. Never think of meddling with this extraordinary duty till thou inurest thyself to the ordinary, and takest more care in thy daily walking with God.

Secondly, There is a more close and immediate preparation required, and this I called actual preparation. It is true he that is conscientious and careful in the ordinary exercises of religion, hath a great advantage over him that neglects them, or is loose in them, for his heart must needs stand in a nearer disposition to this extraordinary service; as he that is up and hath his clothes on is more ready to go on his master's errand than he that is asleep in his bed: yet, besides this care in our daily walking, there need some farther pains to be taken with his heart to raise him unto such a frame as may comport with this solemn service. Now, meditation is the great instrument thou art to use in this preparatory work: allow thyself some considerable portion of time for thy retirement, before the day of extraordinary prayer, wherein thou mayest converse with thy own heart; this cannot be done in a crowd, neither must it be left to the time of engaging in the extraordinary duty. We cannot do both duties together: betake thyself therefore to thy closet, and in the first place call thy thoughts off the world, and as much as is possible clear thy soul of all that is foreign to the work thou art about. Now, the more effectually to bring thy heart to a holy seriousness, and gather thy thoughts together, lay before thee

Digitized by Google

the grand importance of the approaching service. Thou art going to stand before the great God, and that very near, in an extraordinary duty, wherein thou wilt either sanctify or profane his reverend name in a high degree; and accordingly are to expect his love or wrath, in some choice blessing or dreadful curse, to be the issue and result of thy undertaking. Gird the loins of thy mind with some such awful apprehensions as these: as natural fear makes the spirits retire from the outward parts of the body to the heart, so this holy fear of miscarrying, in so solemn a duty, would be a means to call thy thoughts from all exterior carnal objects, and fix them upon the duty in hand. 'In thy fear will I worship,' Psa. v. 7. As the sculpture is on the seal, so will the print on the wax be; if the fear of God be deeply engraven on thy heart, there is no doubt but it will make a suitable impression on the duty thou performest. A few particulars I shall propound for thy thoughts in this preparatory work.

CHAPTER XLIX.

EXAMINATION OF THE END WE PROPOUND IN THIS DUTY.

First, Examine thy soul, and see what end thou propoundest to thyself in extraordinary prayer. None but a child or a fool will run before he knows what is his errand. The end is that which a wise man looks to before he sets his hand to any work; and the more weighty the enterprise is, the more necessary this is. First, Consider, if the end thou propoundest be evil, the duty cannot be good, because thy heart is not sincere in it. The sincerity of the heart discovers itself in the end it aims at in a duty, not in the external performance of it. The thief and the honest traveller may be found riding in the same road; and they have different aims therein. Thus the saint and hypocrite join in the same duty, shoot as it were in the same bow, but their eye takes not the same aim, and therefore their arrows meet not in the same point. The prayers of the one are rejected as abominable, and the other graciously accepted. Who were more seemingly devout than the captive Jews, that kept up a fast for seventy years together? Yet God gave them but little thanks, because their end was not right, Zech. vii. 5: 'When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even unto me?' The faster a man rides, if he be in a wrong road, the farther he goes out of his way. Zeal is the best or worst thing in a duty; if the end be right, it is excellent; but if wrong, it is worthless; and it is no easy thing to propound a right end. The eye must be set right in the head before it can look right. A false heart (and every carnal heart is such) cannot have a true end. Secondly, Consider, that your endeavour in the duty will bear proportion, and be commensurate to the end you propound therein. If your end be low, your endeavour will be no more than to reach that end; as he that intends to build a little cottage, contents himself with ordinary stuff; but he that designs some stately palace, provides more precious materials: thus David was very particular in the materials he laid aside for the temple; 'For the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God;' therefore he prepared with all his might gold and silver, &c., 1 Chron. xxix. 1—3. The hypocrite's ends in a fast are low and base,—his credit with men, carnal profit, and the like; accordingly his endeavour is laid out on the external part of the duty,—a demure countenance, devout posture, and such expressions in prayer as may most take with those that hear him, and this is all he looks at; but the gracious soul saith, with David, This palace which I build, this duty which I perform, is not for man, but for the Lord God; and therefore his chief care is to provide more precious materials,—a broken heart for sin in his confessions, faith and fervency in his petitions, love and thankfulness in his acknowledgments of mercies received. But when is an evil end propounded in this duty? The end we propound may be evil, either intrinsically, when the thing we aim at is evil in its own nature, or else from some irregularity in placing it too high or low in our aim. First, We shall name two ends that are intrinsically evil. First, When a person or a people shall fast and pray, to cover and more slightly carry on any wicked enterprise. This is a horrid evil, a monstrous abomination: yet such deep hypocrisy hath the heart of man discovered, that it dare come and lay its cocka-

Digitized by Google

trice' egg under the very wing of God, and make use of this his solemn ordinance, as an expedient to hatch their wicked designs. The fox, they say, when hard put to it, will, to save himself, fall in among the dogs, and hunt among them as one of the company. Thus the hypocrite, the better to conceal his wicked projects, will run among the saints, and make as loud a cry as the best of them all. It is the devil's old trick, and he hath learned it his instruments, to wrap up wicked plots in the gilded covers of God's ordinances. What plotting and counterplotting was there between Sechem the son of Hamor, and Simeon and Levi! and the expedient which both used to accomplish their designs was an ordinance of God; the one hopes, by submitting to it, to get possession of the whole estate of Jacob's family,—'Shall not their substance be ours?' and the other persuades them to it, that when they were sore they might butcher them without resistance. Absalom, that he may the better play the traitor against his father, begs leave to pay his vow at Hebron. Jezebel sets her trap for Naboth; and that he may the more surely fall into her clutches, she croucheth and humbleth herself even before God in a fast. The demure Pharisees talked much of their fasting, but our Saviour was bold to tell them, it was to devour the widows' houses; but they devour on earth those morsels, that will lie heavy on their stomachs in hell, to be digesting to eternity. Thus the hypocrite, like antichrist, sits in the temple of God, and there commits his execrable abominations, turning a house of prayer into a den of thieves. O, tremble at this great wickedness! It gives a crimson tincture to a sin, when it is committed under the disguise of religion. Secondly, When a person thinks by fasting and prayer to satisfy God for his sin, or merit any favour at his hands. This is wicked and abominable, and as contrary to the nature of prayer as buying is to begging. 'The poor useth entreaties,' Prov. xviii. 23. When Job resolves on prayer, he renounceth any plea taken from his own righteousness; 'Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge,' chap. ix. 15. We cannot have the benefit of the throne of grace, till we quit our legal plea. Christ indeed pleads as righteous, and therefore desires what he asks for us as just, because he hath paid for it; but we pray as sinners, and therefore crave all as mercy; yea, though we plead Christ's merit, because he is the greatest and freest gift of all others. Yet such is the pride of man's heart, that he had rather play the merchant, and exchange his duties for God's blessings, than be thought to receive them gratis. This was the temper of the carnal Jews; they thought to pacify God for their sin, as Jacob his angry brother, with the droves and flocks of duties which they presented him with, and thought their services undervalued when they were not accepted for good payment; hence their bold expostulation with the Lord, 'Wherefore have we fasted, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?' Isa. lviii. 3: such a high opinion they had of themselves. O, take heed of this; pride turns an ordinance into an idol. God accepts our fasts and prayers, when used for humiliation, but abhors them when we bring them for our justification. The proud Pharisee thought of gaining heaven by his numerous fasts; while the poor publican got the prize by an humble confession of his sin, Luke xviii. 10. He that thinks of washing his face with muddy water, instead of making it clean, will leave it dirty. Truly our best tears are not over clean; and can they make us clean that need themselves to be washed? Holy Job durst not rely on his purity; 'If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands ever so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment,' Job ix. 30—32.

Secondly, The end may be, though not intrinsically evil, yet evil from some irregularity; as when we make that our ultimate end, which should only be our subordinate in the duty. The glory of God is to be the ultimate end, in every duty or worship, and all our common actions also, 1 Cor. x. 31; and he certainly should be our utmost end, from whom we received our beginning; 'all things are of him,' and therefore it is fit they should be to him; the river empties itself into the sea from whence it flows. Now if we are to have so high an end in our lowest actions, so we ought in our highest: and such are acts of worship, in which we have immediately to do with God, and are thence

Digitized by Google

called priests, 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, 1 Pet. ii. 5. There is indeed another end for which ordinances are appointed, namely, for the conveyance of all kind of blessings from God unto us: but this is to be subordinate to the former, or else we make the glory of God subservient to our particular good, which he will not endure. Possibly we are in some great affliction; this sets us to pray for deliverance: thus far we keep on our way; but then we turn aside, when our deliverance is more regarded by us than his glory; this is to make use of God, that we may enjoy the creature. Whatever we prefer in our desires, above the glory of God, is an idol-worship by us. The heart can engrave as well as the hand; and an idol in the heart is as bad as one set up in the house.

But how may I find whether the glory of God, or the particular good thing I pray for, be that which I make my chief end in duty? First, By the carriage of thy heart in duty. If the glory of God be chiefly aimed at, this will give a tincture to the whole duty, and influence every part of it; thou wilt suit thy requests to this end. For as there is a secret force from the arm that draws the bow impressed on the arrow, which carries it to the mark aimed at, so there is a secret power which carries the soul out in duty, to act suitably to the end he desires to obtain. We will suppose pardon of sin is the mercy thou prayest for; now if thou desirest sincerely the glory of God as well as this mercy, yea, above it, this will direct thee in thy confession of sin to afflict thy soul more for the dishonour thou hast by it reflected on God, than the wrath thou hast incurred thyself. So in thy petition, thou darest not beg thy pardon on terms that were dishonourable for God to give it, but will desire the mercy in such a way, as his glory may be both secured and advanced. Now God cannot pardon the sin of an impertinent wretch, that holds still the love of his lust, without infinite wrong to his glorious name; therefore if his glory be high in thy eye, thou wilt cry as earnestly for his sanctifying grace as for pardoning mercy, not merely because thou canst not have pardon without it, but because by it thou shalt be fitted to glorify him.

Secondly, It may be discovered by thy carriage after duty in two particulars: First, when the mercy prayed for is obtained. If thou didst chiefly aim at the glory of God in begging it, thy chief care will be to lay it out for his glory now thou hast it; whereas he that aimed at himself in praying for it, will as little regard God in the using of it, as in begging it. It is natural for things to resolve into their principles. The child that Hannah obtained of God, she dedicates unto the Lord,—why? because this was her end in praying for him, 1 Sam. i. 11, compared with ver. 28. When David's prayer is heard, and he delivered, mark his resolve,—'I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living,' Psa. cxvi. 9. Again, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds,' ver. 16. He returns the mercy to God, by improving it for him in a holy life. How can we think he aimed at the glory of God in praying for health, that runs away from God as soon as he is set upon his legs; or in praying for wealth, that lays it out upon his lusts? Secondly, when the thing prayed for is denied. He that aims sincerely at God's glory in prayer for a mercy, (I speak now of such mercies as are but conditionally promised,) will cheerfully submit to the will of God in a denial, because God can in such petitions glorify himself, by denying as well as granting them. David prayed and fasted for the life of his child; it dies notwithstanding: does this denial make him fall out with God? Is he clamorous and discontented? No, it raiseth no storm in his heart, to hinder him in the service of God; he washeth his tears from his cheeks, changes his apparel, and goes cheerfully into the house of God and worshippeth, 2 Sam. xii. 20, so powerfully did the will of God determine his will. Thus, as the heavenly bodies are by the *primum mobile* carried contrary to their particular inclination, so grace in the saint overrules his natural affection, and carries him into a compliance with the will of God when it crosseth his own. Our blessed Saviour had natural affections, which made him pray that the bitter cup of his passion might, if possible, pass from him; yet not so but he was willing to take a denial, and therefore desires his Father to glorify himself, though it were by taking away his life, John xii. 27, 28. Having fixed thy end right, make a diligent search into thy heart and life, whereby

Digitized by Google

thou mayest be enabled more fully and feelingly to lay open thy condition before the Lord.

First, For the sins thou hast committed. The great business of a fast lies in the practice of repentance, and this cannot be done without a narrow scrutiny of the heart: 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord,' Lam. iii. 40. The thief must be found before he can be tried, and tried before he is condemned and executed. Some sins may be apprehended with little pains; but if thou art true to God and thy own soul, thou wouldst not willingly let any escape. How canst thou expect pardon for any, that desirest not justice on all? And how canst thou say, thou desirest justice on those sins, which thou endeavourest not to apprehend? I do not say, thou wilt be able to find all; it is enough, if by thy diligence thou givest proof of thy sincerity, that thou wouldst not conceal any. Set thyself, therefore, in good earnest to the work: beset thy heart and life round, as men would do a wood where murderers are concealed; hunt back to the several stages of thy life; bid memory bring in its old records, and read over what passages are there written; call conscience in to depose what it knows concerning thee, and encourage it to speak freely; and take heed thou dost not check this witness, as some corrupt judges do, when they would favour a bad cause, or give it secret instructions, as David did Joab, to deal gently with thee. Be willing to have thy condition opened fully, and all thy coverings turned up; for many times foul designs are hid under fair pretences. Now when thou hast gone as far as thou canst, begging Heaven's help in the thing to search and try thee, whether there be any further wickedness that thou hast not found out, then judge thyself for them with brokenness of heart, justifying God in the sentence denounced against thee. God will have thee lay thy neck on the block, though he means not to give the stroke. In a word, labour in thy meditations to give every sin its due weight, and suffer thy thoughts to dwell on them, till thou findest the fire of thy indignation kindle in thy heart against them, yea, flame forth into such a holy zeal, as makes thee put thyself under an oath to endeavour their utter ruin and destruction. Then thou art fit to beg thy own life, when thou hast vowed the death of thy sins. Secondly, Mercy received. Thou hast these, at least the most signal instances of them, upon the file, unless thou art a very bad husbandman for thy soul. If God thinks fit to bottle his saints' tears, they surely should not forget to book his mercies. Now, there are some special seasons, wherein the saint should take down this chronicle of God's mercies, to read; and this is one, when he is to engage in this extraordinary duty, First, As the most effectual means to melt his heart for sin. Mercy gives the greatest aggravation to sin, and, therefore, it must needs be the most powerful instrument to break the heart for sin: with this God reproached sinning Israel: 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' Deut. xxxii. 6. They could not have been so evil, if God had not been so good to them. When God would break the sore of his people's sin, he compounds a poultice with his choicest mercies, and lays this warm to their hearts. David had sat many months under the lectures of the law, unhumbled for his complicated sin; but Nathan is sent to preach a rehearsal sermon to him of the many mercies that God had graced him with, and while these coals are pouring on his head, his heart dissolves presently, 2 Sam. xii. 13. The frost is seldom quite out of the earth, till the sun hath gotten some power in the spring to dissolve its bands: neither will hardness of heart be removed until the soul be thoroughly warmed with the sense of God's mercies. 'There shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled, and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight,' Ezek. xx. 43. A pardon from the prince hath made some weep, whom the sight of the block could not move. Sight of wrath inflames the conscience; but sense of mercy kindly melts the heart, and overcomes the will. Secondly, As a necessary ingredient in all our prayers: 'Let your requests be made known with thanksgiving,' Phil. iv. 6. This spice must be in all our offerings. He that prays for a mercy he wants, and is not thankful for mercies received, may seem mindful of himself, but is forgetful of God, and so takes the right course to shut his prayers out of doors. God will not put his mercies into a rent purse; and such is an unthankful heart. Thirdly, Thy

Digitized by Google

wants. Before the tradesman goes to the fair, he looks over his shop, that he may know what commodity he is most in want of. Thou goest to this duty to furnish thyself with the graces and mercies thou needest; is it not necessary to see what thy present store is;—what thy personal, and what thy relative needs are? Not forgetting the public, in whose peace and happiness thou art so much concerned; for, if this ship sink, thou canst not be safe in thy private cabin. To leave all these to occur and overtake thee, without charging thy thoughts with them by previous meditation, is too high a presumption for a sober Christian. Besides, thy affections need help as well as thy memory; nay, we may sooner bring our sins and wants to mind, than lay them to heart; it is easier to know them, than, knowing them, to be deeply affected with them: and we do not come in prayer to tell God a bare story of these things, but feelingly and affectionately to make our moan and complaint, with deep sighs and groans to him, who can pardon the one, and relieve us in the other.

Thirdly, When thou hast upon this scrutiny kindled thy affections by meditation, into a deep sense of these things, then furnish thyself with arguments from the promises to enforce thy prayers, and make them prevalent with God. The promises are the ground of faith, and faith, when strengthened, will make thee fervent; and such fervency ever speeds, and returns with victory out of the field of prayer: 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James v. 16. Words in prayer are but as powder; the promise is the bullet that doth the execution; faith is the grace that chargeth the soul with it; and fervency gives it fire, and dischargeth it into God's bosom with such force, that the Almighty cannot deny it, because, indeed, he will not. Now, as he is an imprudent soldier that leaves his bullets to be cast till he comes into the field, so is he an unwise Christian that doth not provide and sort promises suitable to his condition and request, before he engageth in so solemn a service. Daniel first searcheth out the promise, what God had engaged to do for his people, as also when the date of this promise expired; and when by meditation he had raised his heart to a firm belief thereof, then he sets upon God with a holy violence in prayer, and presseth him close, not only as a merciful God, but righteous also, to remember them, now the bond of his promise was coming out: 'O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem,' &c., Dan. ix. 16. The mightier any one is in the word, the more mighty he will be in prayer.

CHAPTER L.

DIRECTIONS TO BE OBSERVED IN AND AFTER THE DUTY.

HAVING despatched the preparatory directions, I come to those that are to be observed in the duty itself.

SECTION I.—When the time to engage thyself in this extraordinary duty is come, beware thou settest not out in confidence of thy preparation, whatever thy care or success therein hath been. A worthy doctor's advice to ministers, as to their preaching, is applicable to Christians as to their praying; he bade them study for their sermons as if they expected no divine assistance in the pulpit; and when they came into the pulpit, to cast themselves upon Divine assistance as if they had not studied. Thus prepare before thou comest to fast and pray, as if thou wert to meet no farther assistance in the duty; but when thou comest to the performance of the duty, cast thyself wholly upon Divine assistance, as if thou hadst not prepared. I know not which doeth worst, he that presumes upon God's assistance without preparation, or he that presumes on his preparation, and relies not, after he hath done his best endeavour, on the gracious assistance of God. The first shews he hath but mean thoughts of this solemn ordinance, yea, low and unworthy thoughts of the great God with whom he hath to do in it; and the other hath too high thoughts of himself. What though now thou marchest in goodly array, and thy heart in order, how soon, alas! may all thy preparations be routed, and thy chariot-wheels, which thou hast taken so much pains to oil, be set fast, or knocked off! Now thy thoughts are collected: dost thou know where they will be in a few minutes, if thy God help thee not to keep them together? Thou canst as easily hold the four winds in a bag, as keep the thoughts of thy unsettled mind from wandering. Now thy affections are wound up to some height, but will they remain so? Cannot God wither thy

Digitized by Google

hand while thou stretchest it out in prayer?—make thy tongue falter when thou wouldst make use of it?—yea, suffer a sudden damp to fall upon thy spirits that shall chill all thy affections, and leave thy heart as cold as a stone, in thy bosom? 'Surely man, at his best estate, is vanity!' And this in regard of the temper of his spirit, as well as in the constitution of his body, and his worldly advantages. How often do we see the gifts of his mind and the vivacity of his graces fade and wither in one duty, which at another, when the Spirit of God vouchsafed his gentle breath to quicken them, did flourish, and send forth their fragrant spices in abundance! Do not, therefore, entertain too high thoughts of thyself. Secondly, Pray often rather than very long. It is difficult to remain long in prayer, and not slacken in our affections. Those watches which are made to go longer than ordinary at one winding, do commonly lose time toward the end. The flesh is weak, and if the body tire, the soul that rides on this beast, must needs be cast behind. Our Saviour, when he prayed for his life, prayed rather often than long at once. He who in a long journey lights often, to let his beast take breath, will get to his journey's end sooner than he that puts him beyond his strength. Especially observe this in social prayers; for when we pray in company, we must consider them that travel with us in the duty; as Jacob said, 'I will lead on softly, as the children are able to endure.' Yet I speak not this that you should give any check to the Spirit of God in his assistance, which sometimes comes so strong, that the Christian is, as it were, carried with a full forewind; the ship of the soul goes with great speed; such assistances lift both the person praying, and those that join with him (if gracious, and under the same influence,) in a manner above all weariness. The Spirit brings affections with him. Such a soul is like a vessel that runs full and fresh; what comes from him is quick and spiritual; whereas, at another time, when the Spirit of God denies these assistances, his prayer tastes flat to his own palate, if not to others. Thirdly, Be very careful to approve thyself faithful in the soul-humbling work of the day; let thy confessions be free and full; the sense thou hast of thy sins be deep, and thy sorrow for them sincere and evangelical; for as thou acquittest thyself in this, so thou wilt be in all the other parts of the duty; if thou confessest sin feelingly, thou wilt pray against it fervently; if thy sorrow be deep, and reach to thy very heart and spirit, then thy petitions for pardoning mercy and purifying grace will also come from the heart, be cordial, warm, and vehement; whereas he that melts not in confession of sin, will freeze in the prayers that he puts up against it; if his tears be false, his desires cannot be true. Why do men ask in their petitions for that grace which they do not in their hearts desire, but because they do not feel the smart, and do not loathe the evil of their sins which they confess. Thus many confess their sins, as beggars sometimes shew their sores, which they are not willing to have cured. Again, as thou art in confession of sin, so thou wilt be in thy acknowledgments of mercy; the lower thou fallest in the abasement of thyself for thy sins, the higher thou wilt mount in thy praises for his mercies. The deeper thy confession, the louder will thy praises be. The greater our mercies are, the greater are our sins; and the greater our sins, the greater are the mercies; so that the sense we have of one, must needs be in proportion to the other; as we are afflicted for sin, so shall we be affected with mercy. Fourthly, Improve the intervals of prayer with suitable meditations, that thou mayest be fitted to return to the work with more vigour. Meditation is prayer's handmaid, to wait on it both before and after the performance. It is as the plough before the sower, to prepare the heart for the duty of prayer, and as the harrow to cover the seed when it is sown. As the hopper feeds the mill with grist, so doth meditation the heart with matter for prayer. Now if it be necessary that thou shouldst consider before duty what thou art to pray, then surely after duty it is necessary to reflect how thou didst pray. The mill may go, and yet no corn be ground. Thus thou mayest confess many sins, and yet thy heart be not broken for them; thou mayest pray for many graces, and exercise little or no grace in thy praying for them, without which these spices are not broken, and so send not forth their sweet savour. Look, therefore, back on the duty, and observe narrowly what the behaviour of thy heart was in it. If thou findest it to have been lazy, or played the truant, by gadding from the work with impertinent thoughts; in a word, if under the power of any sinful

Digitized by Google

distemper, be sure, at thy return to the duty that thou chargest this home upon thyself with shame and sorrow. This is the only way to stay God from commencing a suit against thee; 'If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged.' 1 Cor. xi. 31. If we do not, then God will do himself justice. Indeed, thou canst not in faith pray for pardon of these sins, till thou hast shewn thyself on God's side, by entering thy protest against them. Moses took the right method; he expressed his zeal first for God against Israel's sin, and then fell hard to the work of prayer for the pardon of it: he durst not open his lips for them to God till he had vented his zeal for him, Exod. xxxii. 26, compared with ver. 30, 31. And if he took this course to intercede for others, how much more shouldst thou, when thou hast to pray for the pardon of thy own sin!

Again, If thou find thy heart was warm in the work, that thy affections flowed out to God, and his love again to thee, take heed that no secret pride robs thee of thy new got treasure; be humble and thankful, remembering they were not thy own wings on which thou wert carried; and also be careful to improve these divine favours, given to encourage thee in the work, as the handfuls of ears of corn let fall for Ruth in the field of Boaz: God would not that they should stop thy mouth, but open it wider when thou comest again to pray. Did thy heart begin to melt in thy bosom? O, now cry for more brokenness of heart! Did thy God cast a kind look on thee? Let it set thee a longing for fuller discoveries of his love. When the beggar sees the rich man putting his hand into his purse, he cries more earnestly. When thou seest God giving, it should embolden thee to ask, as Abraham, who, as God yielded, made his approaches closer, Gen. xviii. 27.

Section II.—How the Christian should carry himself when extraordinary prayer is over; and this lies in a holy watch upon himself. He that prays and watcheth not, is like him that sows a field with precious seed, but leaves the gate open for hogs to come and rout it up. If Satan cannot beat thee in the field, yet he hopes to have thee at an advantage when thou hast disbanded thy forces,—when the duty is over, and thou liest in a careless posture. Esau promised himself an opportunity of avenging himself on Jacob; 'The days of mourning,' saith he, 'for my father are at hand, then will I slay him,' Gen. xxvii. 41. Thus saith Satan, The days of mourning and fasting will soon be over, he will not be always upon his knees praying, not always beating down his body with fasting, and then I will fall upon him. One of these two ways thy danger is likely to come, either by his wounding thy faith, or slackening thy care in thy obedient walking; and if he can do either, he will give a sad blow to thy prayers. First, Look, therefore, after such a day, to thy faith: to pray, and not to exercise thy faith, is to shoot, and not look where the arrow lights. Thou hast in prayer laboured to overcome God, to hear and help thee; now take as much pains to overcome thy heart into a quiet waiting on God, and entire confidence in him. When Jehoshaphat had ended his public fast, he stands up the next day and speaks these words to his people, that hath joined with him: 'Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in the Lord our God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper,' 2 Chron. xx. 20. So when our blessed Saviour had taught his disciples to pray, then he presseth them to commit themselves and their affairs entirely to that God to whom they prayed, Matt. vi. 25, &c. Truly, else extraordinary prayer is but extraordinary prattle: we mock God, and our prayers will mock us, for no fruit will come of them. The hunter may want his supper, though his dogs run fast and hunt well, if, when he comes at the prey he dares not fasten upon it. Now it is faith's office to fasten on the promise, and take hold of God, without which thy loud cry in prayer is fruitless. Canst thou trust thy cause with the lawyer, after opening it to him; and put thy life into the physician's hand, by following his prescriptions, when thou hast acquainted him with thy disease? and darest thou not venture thy stake in God's hand, after thou hast poured thy soul forth to him in prayer? Why shouldst thou think omnipotency cannot help, or truth and faithfulness will not? This is a grievous sin, to bring the name of the great God into question by thy unbelief. Yet this our Saviour complains is the usage that God meets with at their hands from whom he might expect better: 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

Digitized by Google

I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily.' What greater security can the heart of a saint desire more than the word of a faithful God? Yet how few are to be found, after all their praying for deliverance, that can entirely wait for the same! 'Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Luke xviii. 7, 8. Secondly, Thy obedient walk, Solomon's advice is, to keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,' Eccles. v. 1: mine at present is, to look to thy foot as thou comest from it. Thou mayest soon do thy self more mischief than all the devils in hell can do thee: they cannot intercept thy prayers and hinder the happy return of them into thy bosom: but thou mayest. 'Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear,' Isa. lix. 1, 2. This it is that makes God our best friend, stand aloof from his people and their prayers. Be as careful, Christian, after a fast, as a man would be after strong physic: a little disorder in thy walking may be of sad consequence. Remember, that as thou hast left thy prayers, so are thy vows with the Lord; as thou lookest God should answer the one, so he expects thou shouldst pay the other: break thy promise to him, and thou dischargest God of any mercy he owes thee; it is folly to think thou canst bind God, and keep thyself free.

CHAPTER LI.

A FOURFOLD SIMILITUDE TO BE OBSERVED IN PRAYER.

Having despatched the distinction of the kinds of prayer, from which hath been shewn, that we are to pray with all manner of prayer, we now have to consider the diverse matter of prayer: thus, 'To pray with all prayer and supplication,' is to encircle the whole matter of prayer within the compass of our duties, and not to leave anything out which God would have taken in. Now this diversity of the matter of prayer, we will ground on the division the apostle makes, Phil. iv. 6. 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God;' and, 1 Thess. v. 17, 18, 'Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks;' in both which places the whole matter of prayer is comprehended in request and thanksgiving. These two are like the double motion of the lungs, by which they suck in and breathe out the air again. In the petitionary part of prayer, we desire something at God's hands: in thanksgiving, we return praise to him for mercies received from him. I begin with the petitionary part; and it is threefold. First, that part of prayer wherein the Christian desires of God, in the name of Christ, some good thing of the promise to be given unto him. Now, the good things promised are either spiritual or temporal; such a large field hath the Christian given him for his requests to walk in; for godliness hath the 'promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,' 1 Tim. iv. 8. This earth below, to a saint, is a land of promise, though not the land which is chiefly promised. God hath not promised him heaven, and left him to the wide world to shift for his outward subsistence; he hath not bid them live by faith, for their souls, and live by their wits, for their bodies. No; he hath promised to give him 'grace and glory,' he hath also said, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Psa. lxxxiv. 11. Their bill of fare here is provided as well as their inheritance hereafter. Now, here I shall put a compass into your hand, by the help of which you may steer your course safely, when you are bound in your requests to either point of the promise, whether it be for temporal or spiritual mercies; and that I may not run you out of the true channel, upon rocks or sands, I shall touch the needle of that compass I would commend to your use with the loadstone of the Scripture, from which we may gather a fourfold similitude to be used in our request, for spiritual and temporal good things promised, and a threefold dissimilitude also. First. Whether thou prayest for the one or the other, thou must pray in the sense of thy own unworthiness, for thou deservest neither. When Christ prays for us, he pleads as an advocate for justice, because he paid before he prays; but we poor creatures are beggars and must crave all as pure alms, for the money comes not out of our purse, that made the purchase; neither was God the Father bound to engage his Son, or

Digitized by Google

the Son to engage himself in our recovery, who were fallen by forfeiture into the hands of Divine justice: so that mercy is the only plea thou, who art a sinner, canst make with God. Thou mayest with man insist upon thy desert; thus Jacob claimed his wages at Laban's hand; but when he hath to do with God, he changeth his plea,—'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewn thy servant,' Gen. xxxii. 10. So Daniel, 'We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies.' There is no blessing so great, but it may be obtained, where mercy is the plea, although we merit none. If thou wouldst, therefore, beg anything at God's hand, confess thou deservest nothing. Then are we fit to receive great things from God, when we are least in our own eyes; then nearest the crown, when we judge ourselves unworthy of a crust. The proud Pharisee brought his righteousness in his prayer to God, and carried away his sin bound upon him; the publican brought his sin in his humble confession, and carries away his absolution and justification with him. Thus God crosseth his hands, like Jacob, in giving his blessings. Secondly, In both thou must pray in faith; for both spiritual and temporal blessings are promised, and therefore thou art to believe that God will be as faithful in the performance of the less promises that concern this life, as in the more weighty matters which respect thy eternal happiness in the other; indeed, he promised spiritual blessings in specie, grace and glory he will give; but temporal enjoyments either in kind or value: 'No good thing will he withhold.' And it is fit he should judge when a temporal enjoyment will be good for us, and when it will be better to give some other thing in the lieu of it. Hence that method in our Lord's prayer, 'Thy will be done,' before we pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' But the seal is the same which ratifies temporal promises with that which he sets to spiritual; his truth and faithfulness are as deeply obliged to perform temporal promises, according to the tenure in which they are made, as to make good the other. And, therefore, we are as strongly to acquiesce in his care and providence for our protection and provision here, as for our salvation hereafter; else he had done his people wrong to take them off from an anxious care for those things which he meant not to charge his providence with. Certainly, if he bid us be careful for none of these things, but only let our requests be made known to him, he intends not that we should lose anything, but thereby would have us understand and believe, that he will take the care upon himself, and give us at last a full account of his love and faithfulness in the issue of his providence, how all was disposed for our best advantage. Thirdly, We must join our endeavours in the use of all means with our prayers, whether they be put up for spiritual or temporal blessings. 2 Thess. iii. 10, 'This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.' And certainly God will not bid them welcome to his door, whom he would have us deny at ours. When the ship is likely to sink, we must not only pray, but apply our hands to the pump. Is it temporal subsistence thou prayest for? Pray and work, or pray and starve. Dost thou think to set God at work, whilst thou sittest with thy hand in thy bosom? Those two proverbs are observable,—'The hand of the diligent maketh rich,' Prov. x. 4; and, ver. 22, 'The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.' He that prays, but is not diligent, is not likely to be rich; he that is diligent, but prays not, may be rich, but he cannot be blessed with his riches; but he that obtains his riches by sincere prayer in conjunction with his diligence, is rich by the blessing of God, and shall escape the sorrow which the worldling lays up with his money; yea, though he gets not an estate, yet he hath the blessing of God, and that makes him rich when there is no money in his purse. Again, Is it spiritual blessing thou prayest for? Wouldst thou have more knowledge in the things of God? Think not it will drop into thy mind without endeavour. Daniel studied as well as prayed; his eyes were one while on the book, and another while lifted up to heaven in prayer, Dan. ix. 2, &c. 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' Dan. xii. 4. It is got by running from one means to another; as the merchant's ship takes in some of her freight at one port, some at another, so the Christian gets some light in a sermon, some in a conference, some in one duty, some in another. And he that takes up one duty, but through sloth neglects the rest, saves but his pains to lose his gains.

Digitized by Google

Sometimes God is found in this duty, and sometimes in that, on purpose to keep up the credit of all. Fourthly, Our requests for both must be spiced with thanksgiving: 'Let your requests be made known with thanksgiving,' Phil. iv. 6; and, 1 Thess. v. 18, 'In everything give thanks.' Art thou praying for the love and favour of God? Bless God thou art where it may be obtained, and not in hell, past hope or help. Is it health thou desirest? Bless God for life; It is the Lord's mercy we are not consumed.' No condition on earth can be so sad, in which there may not some mixture of mercy be found interwoven. Utter darkness, without any mercy, is found in hell alone. Come not, therefore, to pray, till you know also what to praise God for. As God hath an open hand to give, so he hath an open eye to see who comes to his door, and to discern between the thankful beggar and the unthankful. Will God give more to him, on whom all is lost that he hath formerly bestowed? Indeed, he doth good to the evil and unthankful, but it is not a gracious return of their prayers, but an act of his common providence, of which they will have little comfort when he brings the bounty of his providence in judgment against them, to aggravate their sins, and increase their torment.

CHAPTER LII.

A THREE-FOLD DISSIMILITUDE TO BE MADE IN OUR REQUESTS.

First, Temporal blessings are chiefly to be desired for the sake of spiritual. The traveller desires a horse, not for itself, so much as for the convenience of the journey he has to go. Thus the Christian, when praying for temporal things, should desire them as helps in his way and passage to heaven. I do not say it is unlawful to desire life, health, and other comforts of this life, for the suitableness that these have to our natural affections, and to supply our outward necessities; but to desire them only for this, is low and base, it is the mere cry of the creature; the ravens thus cry, and all the beasts of the field seek their meat of God; that is, they desire the preservation of their lives, and make their moan when they want that which should support them: and these creatures, being made for no higher end than the enjoyment of these particular good things, observe the law of their creation. But thou art an intellectual being, and by thy immortal soul, which is a spiritual substance, thou art as near akin to the angels in heaven, as thou art, by thy meaner bodily part, to the beasts; yea, allied to God, thy Maker; not only made by him, as they were, but for him. He is thy chief good, and therefore thou infinitely dishonourest him, if thy desires can be satisfied with anything short of him. Thus shouldst thou say,—O Lord, as all my gifts and services do not please thee, except with them I give thee myself; so none of these gifts of thy bounty can content me, except with them thou wilt bestow thyself on me. Now, this regular motion of the heart in praying for temporals is to be found only in those whose inward powers are set right by Divine grace. Man in his corrupt state is like Nebuchadnezzar, he hath a beast's heart, that craves no more than the satisfaction of his sensual appetite; but when renewed by grace, then his understanding returns to him, by which he is enabled, in praying for temporals, to elevate his desires to a nobler end. Doth David pray that some farther time may be added to his temporal life? It is not out of a fond love to this world, but to prepare himself the better for another: 'O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more!' Psa. xxxix. 13. Is he comforted with hopes of a longer stay here? It is not this world's carnal pleasures that kindle this joy in his holy breast, but the advantage that thereby he shall have for praising God in the land of the living: 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God, Psa. xlii. 11. The saint hath as quick a sense to taste the sweetness of a temporal mercy as another; but his heart being spiritual, and so acquainted with higher enjoyments, he desires that God would not put him off with these shells of blessings. O, how few thus pray for temporals! Some pray for temporal mercies, which, if granted, would only serve to satisfy their lusts. 'Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts,' James iv. 3. One is sick, and prays for health, that he may be again at his pots or harlots; another is childless, and he would have an heir, to uphold the pride and grandeur of his house, but not the increase

Digitized by Google

of Christ's family in the world; a third would be a greater man in the world, and for what?—may be, that, having more power, he may take the fuller revenge on his enemies, who now are out of his reach; and others that bring not their sacrifice with so evil a mind, yet look no higher than their carnal contentment in the enjoyment they would have. Thus mariners (Psa. cvii. 28) 'cry unto the Lord in their trouble;' and when they have their life given them, 'then they are glad, because they are quiet,' and God hears no more of them, now their turn is served; a plain evidence they were carnal in their prayer for this mercy, because they improve it not for a spiritual end; which makes the psalmist break forth, ver. 31, 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!' But much more abominable is it to pray for spiritual mercies for the sake of some temporal advantage we hope to have by them. Thus Simon Magus desired the gifts of the Holy Ghost, that he might be famous. And do not some make a profession of the gospel, with no other view than to improve their trade; others pray for the assistances of the Spirit, and project their own praise by the means, basely perverting those holy things to secular advantages. O horrid baseness! as if one should desire a prince's robe to stop an oven with it. This is to make God the stirrup, and the creature our saddle. Those spiritual blessings which are intrinsical to our happiness, and indispensably necessary to our salvation, these we are to pray for with an undeniable importunity; such are pardon of sin, the love and favour of God, and the sanctifying graces of the Spirit; to be cold or indifferent in our prayers for these, is great wickedness. The promise will bear us out in our greatest importunity; Psa. cv. 4, 'Seek ye the Lord and his strength; seek his face for evermore.' Rev. xxii. 17, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' Nothing loseth us these mercies more, than weak velleities, and faint desires of them. But our prayers for temporal blessings must be with a latitude of submission to the will of God, because they are promised conditionally. The promise is the foundation of our faith, the superstructure therefore of our prayers must not go beyond it. This was Israel's sin, 'Who shall give us flesh to eat?' Numb. xi. 18. God had, indeed, promised to feed them in the wilderness, but not to give them every dish their wanton palate craved; and, therefore, when they are dissatisfied with God's bill of fare, and cry for flesh, they have their desire, but sour sauce with it; for 'while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them,' Psa. lxxviii. 31: thus, they were fed for the slaughter, by the meat they inordinately lusted after. O, take heed of peremptory prayers for any temporal enjoyment, for thereby thou beggest but a rod for thy own back. Rachel must have children, or else she dies, and she at last hath two, but dies in travail. It was a smart saying of one to his wife, who passionately desired a son and had one at last, but none of the wisest: 'Wife,' saith he, 'thou hast long passionately desired a boy, and now thou hast one that will always be a boy.' God may justly set some print of his anger on that mercy, which he answers our peremptory prayers with. Why, alas! must we have that which we must needs lose, or shall not enjoy it while we have it?

Thirdly, Those spiritual blessings which are intrinsical to the saint's happiness are to be prayed for with boundless desires; not, Give me thus much grace, and I will trouble thee for no more; no, God gives a little grace, not to stop our mouth, but to open it wider. Yet, alas, how very reasonable are most in this particular! So much holiness contents them as will, like salt, keep them from putrefying in gross sins, that they be not unsavoury to the nostrils of their neighbours, or as will save them from the lash of a tormenting conscience; like school-boys, that care for no more of their lesson than will save a whipping. Alas! this is not to desire it at all; it is thy credit abroad, and thy quiet within thou desirest. He that knows the true worth of grace, thinks he hath never enough till satisfied with it in glory. Paul had more than many of his brethren, yet he prays, and presseth hard after more, Phil. iii. 13, 14. But in temporal enjoyments, we are to curb our desires, and not let out all the sails of our affections when praying for them. A gracious heart is as unwilling to have too much of these, as too little; 'Give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me,' Prov. xxx. 8. There is not a saint but could cheerfully say Amen to this prayer of Agur. The nature of these temporal good things is enough to convince any wise man that the meanest is best. They are not the

Digitized by Google

Christian's freight, but his ballast, and therefore are to be desired to poise, not load the vessel; they are not his portion, but his spending-money in his journey; and no wise traveller desires to carry more money about him than will defray his expenses.

CHAPTER LIII.

OF DEPRECATORY PRAYER.

The second branch in the petitionary part of prayer is deprecation, wherein we desire of God, in the name of Christ, the removal of some evil felt or feared. Here I shall briefly point at the evils to be deprecated, and how we are to frame our requests to God in deprecating of them. All evil is comprehended in these two,—*sin* or *suffering*. First, Sin: this indeed is the evil of evils, against which chiefly we are to pray. This is the only thing that is intrinsically evil in its own nature; suffering is rather an evil to us, than an evil in itself, and our sufferings have both their being and malignity from the evil of our sins. Had there been no sin, there had been no suffering; where that ceaseth, this is not to be found. There is no sorrow in heaven, because no sin. 'If thou doest evil, sin lieth at the door;' that is, if thou doest the evil of sin, prepare to meet with the evil of suffering. Now, in sin, two things are to be deprecated. First, Guilt: this is the proper effect and consequence of every sin. Whenever any sin is committed, there is guilt contracted, whereby the creature becomes obnoxious to the wrath of God; and this guilt wears not off by length of time, but continues bound upon the sinner, till God, by an act of pardoning mercy, absolves him; so that though the act of sin be transient, and passeth away as soon as the fact is committed, yet the creature is in the bond of his iniquity, held with this chain of guilt as a prisoner to Divine justice, till he by faith and repentance receives pardon;—as a felon, who, may be, is not presently after the fact taken and brought into judgment, yet abides a debtor to the law, till he can obtain his pardon. Now, need I say anything to set out the dismal condition of a soul under guilt, thereby to provoke you to pray for the removal of it? There is no mountain so heavy as the guilt of the least sin is to an awakened conscience. Better thy house were haunted with devils, than thy soul with guilt. If thy conscience tells thee thou art in the bond of iniquity, thou canst not but be in the gall of bitterness, they are joined together, Acts viii. 23. Guilt is a burden which the sinner can neither stand under nor throw off. This lies throbbing in his soul like a thorn in the flesh, and will not let him rest by day, or sleep by night: he turns himself on his bed, as Regulus in his barrel stuck with nails, not an easy part can he find in it. This makes him afraid of every disease, lest it should arrest him, and bring him by death to judgment. The mark that God set upon Cain, Gen. iv. 15, is by many conceived to be a trembling heart, made visible by a ghastly countenance, and discomposed carriage of his outward man: and that passage, ver. 12, 'A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth,' the Septuagint reads thus, 'Thou shalt be sighing and trembling in the earth.' No convulsive fit so distorts the body as sin doth the soul. Now, in this prayer against guilt, and for pardon, observe particulars.

First, Pray with a deep sense and sorrow for thy sins. The worse nonsense in prayer is of the heart, when that hath no sense of the sins deprecated, or of the mercy desired. Nothing more hardens the heart of God against our prayer than the hardness of our heart in prayer; and, on the contrary, there is no such way to melt God into pity, as for our own hearts to dissolve into sorrow. He that would have us give wine to the sad heart, Prov. xxxi. 6, saves the promise of pardoning mercy, which holds the sweetest wine in God's cellar, 'to revive the heart of the contrite ones,' Isa. lvii. 15. A tear in the eye for sin adorns the creature more than a jewel in his ear, and his prayer more than all the embellishment of expressions in it can do. While the publican smote on his own breast, he got into God's bosom, and carried a pardon home with him. Will Christ drop his blood to procure thy pardon, who can shed no tears for thy sin? Here lies the difficulty of the work, not how to move God, but how to get the sinner's own heart melted. It is harder to get sin felt by the creature, than the burden, when felt, removed by the hand of a forgiving God. Never was a tender-hearted surgeon more willing to bind up the wound of his fainting patient, than God is,

Digitized by Google

by his pardoning mercy, to ease the troubled spirit of a mourning penitent. It is one rule he gives his servants in their practice upon their spiritual patients, to beware of making too great evacuations in the souls of poor sinners by excessive humiliation, lest thereby the spirits of their faith be too much weakened. 'Sufficient to such a man is this punishment,' &c.; 'so that, contrariwise, ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest, perhaps, such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow,' 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7.

Secondly, Justify God in all the expressions of his displeasure for thy sins. Thou dost perhaps carry the marks of his anger on thy flesh in some outward judgment, or, which is worse, the terrors of the Lord have taken hold of thy soul, and, like poisoned arrows, lie burning in thy conscience, where they stick; acknowledge him just, and all this that is come upon thee less than thy iniquities have deserved, Ezra ix. 13. The way to escape the fatal stroke of his axe, is to kiss the block; clear his justice, and fear not but his mercy will save thy life. Thou hast a promise on thy side,—'If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant,' Levit. xxvi. 41, 42. David took this course,—'I acknowledge my transgressions,' Psa. li. 3; and why is he so willing to spread his sins in his confession before the Lord? see ver. 4,—'That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' He would have all the world know that God did him no wrong in the judgments that came upon him; he takes all the blame upon himself.

Thirdly, Take heed thou prayest not with a reservation: be sure thou renouncest what thou wouldst have God remit. God will never remove the guilt so long as thou entertainest the sin. What prince will pardon his treason that means to continue a traitor? It is despicable folly to desire God to forgive what thou intendest to commit. Thou hadst as good speak out, and ask leave to sin with impunity, for God knows the language of thy heart, and needs not thy tongue to be an interpreter. Some princes have misplaced their high favours to their heavy cost, as the emperor Leo Armenius, who pardoned that monster of ingratitude, Michael Balbus, and was, the same night he delivered him from prison, murdered by him. But the great God is not subject to any mistake in his government: a hypocrite never got pardon in the disguise of a saint. He will call thee by thy own name, though thou comest to him in the semblance of a penitent: 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam,' said the prophet. Hypocrisy is too thin a veil to blind the eyes of the Almighty. Thou mayest put thy own eyes out, so as not to see him, but thou canst never blind his eyes so that he should not see thee. And as long as God loves himself, he must needs hate the hypocrite; and if he hates him, surely he will not pardon him. The pardoned soul, and the sincere, are all one: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile,' Psa. xxxii. 2.

Fourthly, Make Christ thy plea. Pardon of sin is a favour not know in the first covenant. Do and live, transgress and die, were all its contents; there was no room left for recovery by that law. The gospel covenant is the only plank by which we may recover the shore after our miserable wreck. This covenant is founded in Christ, who hath, upon an agreement with his Father, undertaken to answer the demands of the law, and happily performed what he undertook; upon which the gospel is preached, and pardon promised to all that repent and believe on him: 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, Acts v. 31. Him 'hath God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,' Rom. iii. 25. As, therefore, when Christ intercedes for poor sinners, he carries his blood with him, and presents it to God for them, so thou mayest bring the same blood in the hand of thy faith, when thou prayest for the pardon of thy sins, 'for without blood there is no remission,' Heb. ix. 22. This is the more to be heeded, because many out of ignorance, and some from a corrupt principle, apply themselves in their prayers to the absolute goodness and mercy of God for pardon: ask them why they hope to be forgiven, and they will tell you God is good, and they hope he will be merciful to them, seeing his nature is so gracious. But, alas! they forget that he is just as well as merciful, and his mercy will not act but with the consent of his justice. Now, the only salve for the justice of God, is the satisfaction of Christ. 'God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness,—that

Digitized by Google

he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' Rom. iii. 26. So that to desire God to forgive thee thy sin without the intervening of Christ's satisfaction, is to desire God to be unjust, and pardon thee with the loss of his own honour.

Lastly, Take no denial in this thy request, but pray for it with unwearied importunity. It is a mercy more necessary than thy very being; better never to be, than ever be unpardoned. Think but a little on thy dismal condition, while thy guilt is not taken off, and thy pardon not obtained, and it is impossible that thou shouldst be a cold, faint suitor for this mercy of mercies. Know, then, while unpardoned, thou art God's prisoner; all the plagues written in the law cleave as close to thee as thy girdle to thy loins; every moment thou mayest fear they should take hold upon thee. Where canst thou be safe, who hast God for thine enemy? Can the bread resist him that eats it? Or the tree withstand the axe of the feller? Truly, no more canst thou the wrath of an avenging God. Is it not he that holds the devil in chains;—he who can kindle a fire in thy own bones, and make thee consume like lime with the inward burning of thy self-tormenting thoughts? Is he not a righteous God, whose justice binds him in the distributions of punishment, to be exact according to the sinner's demerit? Is he not the everlasting God? Not a sorry creature, who may threaten thee to-day, and be dead himself to-morrow; but who ever lives to take vengeance on sinners, out of whose hands thou canst not escape by dying. In earthly courts, when the man dies, his cause dies with him because out of their jurisdiction. But at death thou fallest into the hands of the living God, who will pursue his quarrel with thee in the other world also. No sooner is thy soul abandoned of thy body, and turned out of its earthly house, but it shall return to God to receive its doom. Neither shall thy body long rest in the grave, but be called forth to share with the soul in torment, whose partner it had been in sin. The parting of these at death to a guilty soul is sad enough, but their meeting again at the great day of judgment will be much more dismal. For husband and wife that have joined in some bloody murder, to be separated and sent to different prisons in order to their trial, must needs fill them with the fear and terror of their approaching judgment; but much more dreadful is it to them, when brought forth, to be sentenced to suffer at the same gibbet together. At death, the sinner's body is disposed of to one prison, his soul to another, and both to meet again at the great day of assize, then to be sent, by the final sentence of the judge, to everlasting flames in hell's fiery furnace, where, after the poor wretch hath experienced for a thousand million of years the weight of God's just vengeance, he shall find himself no nearer the end of his misery than he was the first day wherein his torment commenced. Then death will be desired as a favour, but it shall flee from him, his misery being both intolerable and interminable. By this time, I suppose a pardon will be thought worth thy having, and too good to be lost by sluggish praying for it. When, therefore, thou hast a sense of the indispensable necessity of this mercy, take up a holy resolution to lay thy siege close to the throne of grace, never to rise till God opens the gates of his mercy to thee. As it is so necessary, thou hast the promise of a faithful God, that thou shalt not miss it, upon the sincere seeking of it. 'If we confess, he is just and faithful to forgive.' Prayers and tears are the weapons with which the Almighty may be overcome. Manasseh, who could not on his throne, when he sinned against God, defend himself from his justice, yet in his dungeon greatly humbling himself before the Lord, obtained his mercy. So Israel, when he sinned he died, but when he spake trembling, then he was exalted; Hos. xiii. 1.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW TO DEPRECATE THE DEFILING POWER OF SIN.

The second thing in sin to be deprecated, is the defiling power of it. He that desires not to be purged from the filth of sin, prays in vain to be eased of the guilt. If we love the work of sin, we must take the wages. A false heart could be willing to have his sin covered, but the sincere desires his nature may be cleansed. David begged a clean heart as well as a quiet conscience,—'Blot out all mine iniquities; create in me a clean heart, O God,' Psa.

Digitized by Google

li. 9, 10. He desires water to purify his heart, as well as blood to pacify his conscience. Now, in thy requests, observe these particulars: First, Be sure thou come with a deep abhorrence of thyself for that sin which cleaves to thee. This is called knowing the plague of a man's own heart, 1 Kings viii. 38, when a creature is affected and afflicted with the sense of his corruptions, as if he had so many plague-sores upon him, and loathes himself for them, as much as Job did for the boils with which his body was covered. The leper was commanded in order to his cure, to put himself into a mourner's habit; Levit. xiii. 45, 'His clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean!' Why all this, but to express the deep sense of his sin and misery? Look upon the saints in Scripture, and you shall find this was their way to abase themselves in their prayers, with the greatest self-abhorrence possible. Penitent David takes the fool, yea, the beast unto him,—'So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee,' Psa. lxxiii. 22. Holy Job cries out, 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' chap. xlii. 6. Others blush, and are as much ashamed to be seen in the presence of God, as one that had fallen into some puddle would be to come before his prince. Secondly, in praying against thy lusts, see that thy heart goes with thy tongue. In nothing do our hearts more cheat us than in our prayers, and in no requests more than in those which are levelled against our lusts. That is oftentimes least intended, which is most pretended. And truly we had need be well acquainted with ourselves before we can find the bottom of our designs. Thus the hypocritical Jews first set up their idols in their hearts, and then inquired of the Lord, Ezek. xiv. 3: this is a great wickedness; and it were a just, though a heavy plague, for God to answer such according to the secret wish of their hearts, by giving them up to those lusts which they inwardly love. When Paul begs prayers for himself, to embolden the saints in their requests for him, he assures them of his sincerity,—'Pray for us: for we trust that we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly;' as if he had said, I durst not make you my spokesman to God, if my heart told me that I secretly complied with any sin. How then canst thou have the face to go thyself to God on an errand, to desire that of him which thou wouldst be loth to have?

But how may we come to know that our hearts are sincere or hypocritical, in praying against the defiling power of sin? First, Observe whether thy prayer be uniform against all sin. The sincere Christian is not hot against one and cold against another; he 'hates every false way,' Psa. cxix. 104: in his prayers he has no wish to entertain any one sin;—'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' ver. 132: he knows, if all his chains were knocked off, and only one left upon him, he should be as true a slave to Satan, as if all the others were still on. He prays not against one sin, because a great one, and pleads for another, because it is a little one. Little sins contribute as well as great, to keep up the partition-wall between God and the creature, defile the soul, and swell the sinner's account; therefore he prays against them as well as the others. David, who desired to be kept back from presumptuous sins, did also beg to be cleansed from his secret sins, Psa. xix. 12. Secondly, Observe whether thy heart stands firmly resolved to renounce that sin thou prayest God to subdue. The sincere Christian binds himself, as well as engages God against his sin. Indeed, that prayer is a blank which hath not a vow in it,—'Thou, O God, hast heard my vows,' Psa. lxi. 5; that is, his prayers, which are always to be put up with vows. Is it a mercy thou prayest him to give? If sincere, thou wilt vow to praise him for it, and serve him with it. Is it a sin thou prayest against? Except thou jugglest with God, thou wilt vow as well as pray against it. 'Remove from me the way of lying,' Psa. cxix. 29; this is David's deprecation; now mark his vow,—'I have chosen the way of truth, thy judgments I have laid before me,' ver. 30. While he prays against the way of lying, he chooseth the way of truth. Thirdly, Art thou vigorous in the use of all appointed means to mortify the lust thou prayest against? Resolutions in time of prayer are good, when backed with strenuous endeavours; otherwise they are but a blind for a false heart to cover itself. Samson did not only pray he might be avenged on his enemies, but set his hands to the pillars of the house. He that hath bid thee

Digitized by Google

pray against thy lust, hath bid thee shun the occasions of it; 'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house, lest thou give thine honour unto others,' Prov. v. 8; that is, lest thou be enticed by the occasion. Thus Joseph, that he might not be drawn to lie with his mistress, would not stay alone in the room with her, Gen. xxxix. 12. So Prov. xxiii. 20, 'Be not among winebibbers;' and ver. 31, 'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup,' because looking may induce liking. Now, art thou conscientiously careful to keep out of the way that leads to sin, and to shun the occasion that might betray thee into it? Certainly, he that would not have his house blown up, will not set gunpowder in the chimney-corner. Again, God, who bids thee pray against thy lusts, commands thee also to take the sword of his word, by meditating on it, that thou mayest obtain a victory over them. Thus David hid the word in his heart, that he might not sin. Thou prayest against covetousness,—what dost thou toward thy delivery from this lust? Here is a sword put into thy hand, whose edge is sharp enough to kill it. This sets forth how vile and base a sin covetousness is; it takes away all occasion of inordinate desires for the world, by many sweet promises,—what he hath laid up in another world for us, and what care in his providence he will take for us in this. 'Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have,' Heb. xiii. 5. What use dost thou make of this? Doth it strengthen thy assent to the truth of these promises? Affect thy heart with the sweetness of them, and then draw forth this sword to defend thyself against this lust? If so, thou wert sincere in thy prayer. A false heart contents itself with a few lazy prayers against this lust, but is afraid to use this sword against it. Now to raise thyself to the greater vehemency in praying against thy lusts, pray to have thy heart affected with what a fearful plague it is for a soul to be given up of God to the power of his lusts. This will make thee lay siege to God with the utmost importunity, knowing thou art undone if thou speedest not. When God intends to smite home, he takes his aim at the heart, he gives the creature over to his lust: thus he hardened Pharoah to a final obstinacy: 'I will send all my plagues upon thine heart,' Exod. ix. 14. They did not only light upon the beasts and fruits of the field, or upon their own bodies, but chiefly on their hearts, hardening them into obstinacy to their destruction. This indeed is to send all plagues in one; others that reach only to the estate or body are consistent with the love and favour of God; he can smite the body, and smile on the soul; blast the man's estate, and bless him with spiritual riches; make him poor in the world, and rich in faith. But he that is given up to his lust is abhorred of God. A saint may be delivered up to Satan, to correct him, for the destruction of the flesh and saving of his spirit; but it is the brand of a reprobate to be delivered up to Satan, that his lusts may have full power over him; which judiciary act of God portends the sinner's destruction, Deut. ii. 30; 2 Thess. ii. 11. Outward plagues are sometimes in the sinner's mouth as a bridle to prevent him from sinning, but this restraint serves only to increase his appetite; it takes away the sense of sin, and then the wretch follows his lusts, and nothing can stop him, but to hell he will go.

Pray against the power of thy lusts, deliverance from which is a branch of the gospel covenant. God is not bound by the first covenant to stir a foot for man's help. Man went of his own accord over to the devil's quarters; he deserted God, and chose a new lord, and in his hands God might have left him, without offering any help. It was not any tie that man had upon God by the covenant of nature which obliged him, but his own free grace that moved him to undertake his recovery: and this he doth by making a new covenant on the ruins of the old. So that whoever will pray against his lusts with success, must first become a covenanter with God, by accepting the terms upon which he offers to save us from our sins, and they are faith and repentance; when the soul doth thus turn from his sins to close with Christ, then he becomes a covenanter with God, and may, through faith, call God into the field for his help against this huge host of lusts and devils that come against him. God's chariots are his, the whole army of heaven is engaged in his quarrel. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' and why?—'For ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. vi. 14; that is, you are not under the law covenant made with Adam, but under the gospel covenant made with Christ,

Digitized by Google

and, through him, with all believers. O how many prayers against sin are lost, for want of well understanding this grand notion of the gospel! A great cry is made by many of their sins to God, and victory over them pretended to be desired; yet they live, and grow stronger every day;—what is the reason? Alas! they stand not in a federal relation to God. Will a prince raise an army to fight for he knows not who? Indeed, if his subjects or allies be in distress, he is ready to step in for their succour; but strangers cannot expect he should do this for them. Leagues are made before any assistance is desired. God first promiseth to bring Israel under the bond of his covenant, Ezek. xx. 37, and then ver. 41, that he will accept them with their sweet savour. David knew that the carnal world is abandoned by God, to be trod under the foot of every lust; therefore when he prays God would order his steps in his word, and let no iniquity have dominion over him, he desires it as a favour peculiar to those that were near and dear to him,—'Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.' Psa. cxix. 132. Pray not only against the power of sin, but for the power of holiness. A wicked man may pray against his sins, not out of any inward enmity to them, or love to holiness, but because they are troublesome guests to his conscience. His zeal is false, that seems hot against sin, but is cold to holiness. A city is rebellious that keeps its rightful prince out, though it receives not his enemy in: nay, the devil need not fear, but at last he shall make that soul his garrison again, out of which for a while he seems shut, so long as it stands empty, and is not filled with grace, Matt. xii. 44, 45. What, indeed, should hinder Satan's re-entry into that house, which hath none in it to keep him out?

CHAPTER LV.

HOW TO DEPRECATE THE EVIL OF SUFFERING.

The second object of deprecatory prayer is suffering. Sin brought suffering into the world. Sin is indeed the elder twin, but suffering stayed not long after it, for it took it by the heel, arresting Adam upon the very place where he committed his trespass, and ever since follows it as close as the shadow doth the body. It leaves not the saint till death parts him and his sin; but pursues the wicked with their sins into the other world also. So that this distribution of suffering into temporal and eternal shall suffice, because it comprehends all the miseries which sin hath brought upon the sons of men. First, temporal sufferings,—how the Christian is to deprecate and pray against them; which I shall do two ways.

Section I.—First, Negatively. The Christian is not to pray for an immunity from all temporal sufferings; there is no foundation for such a prayer in the promise; and what God thinks not fit to promise, we must not be bold to ask. God had one Son without sin, but none in this life without suffering. John writes himself, 'Your brother and companion in tribulation,' Rev. i. 9. He hath too high an opinion of himself, that would have God lead him dry-shod to heaven, while he sees the rest of his brethren march through thick and thin to the same place; or who thinks he needs not this thorn of suffering, to keep him as well as others from wandering out of his way to glory. The rod is not more needful to children, than suffering is to the saints while on earth. While thou art subject to sin, thou must submit to his disciplinary rod. Valetudinarian bodies can as well do without food as physic; and saints in this state may as well live without ordinances as sufferings. In a word, to pray absolutely against all suffering, is to desire one of the greatest punishments on this side hell. When God said, 'I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom,' Hos. iv. 14, he meant them no good by sparing his rod. If we count him an unwise father, who when he puts his child to school, desires the master not to whip him; surely, much greater folly were it in thee to desire God to privilege thee from all suffering. Secondly, Affirmatively. Deprecate the vindictive justice and wrath of God in all temporal sufferings, Jer. x. 24: 'O Lord, correct me, but in judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.' And chap. xvii. 17: 'Be not a terror unto me: thou art my hope in the day of evil.' He declines not suffering, but deprecates wrath; as if he had said, Let trouble come, but not with this message, to tell me that thou art

Digitized by Google

mine enemy; shoot thy darts, my breast is open to receive them, but let them not be envenomed arrows, headed with thy punitive justice. Without the sting, all suffering is innocent and harmless; but if the creature does fear (though without just cause) that they are shot out of justice's bow, then they drink up his spirits. 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,' Psa. xxxix. 11. That holy woman, 1 Kings xvii. 18, was not so much distressed for her son's death, as for the reflection this sad providence made upon her conscience,—'Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and slay my son?' Thou canst not therefore be too passionately importunate in deprecating this. Thirdly, Deprecate the snare and temptation that suffering may expose thee to. Satan commonly finds it easy to make some sinful impression upon the saint when his 'heart is made soft,' as Job phraseth it, 'in the furnace of affliction.' He is a rare Christian in whom the stream of his grace runs clear under such circumstances. Job was a man of a thousand,—'None like him in all the earth, a perfect and an upright man;' yet he betrayed many weaknesses in his troubles, and would have done more, had not God, in pity to his poor servant, taken the devil off, before he had quite run him down. Christ teacheth us to pray against suffering under the notion of temptation,—'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:' that is, Let us not be led into sin when we fall into suffering; let us not fall into thy hands and Satan's together. This discovers a holy frame of heart, to be more tender of our conscience than of our skin; not so much to fear affliction from God, as, lest in it we should behave ourselves unseemly toward him. Agur is not so much ashamed to beg, as afraid to steal, and so take the name of his God in vain, upon which account he chiefly prays against poverty, Prov. xxx. 8, 9. Self-denial is the best self-seeking, for by neglecting ourselves for God's sake, we oblige him to take the care of us upon himself; and he is the only happy man, whose sole dependence is upon God. Fourthly, Deprecate the excess of suffering, that thou be not overladen. This is promised; thou mayest therefore present it in faith: Jer. xlvi. 28: 'I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure.' The patient doth not intrench upon the physician's art, by desiring him to proportion his dose according to the weakness of his body, if, when he hath done, he acknowledgeth his skill and faithfulness. Indeed, to desire God to consider our weakness, and then not to rely on his wisdom and care, but continue jealous and suspicious, or to murmur at his prescriptions, as if the physic he gave were too strong, is to make a dishonourable reflection upon him. Sometimes the physician exceeds the proportion that his fearful patient thinks enough, but withal tells him, You are not so weak as you take yourself to be; your body may bear so many grains more in the composition; leave me to my art and all shall be well. Thus God, who knows our frame, deals with his people, and is highly pleased to see them satisfied with what he orders them: 'In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly,' chap. i. 22; he did not impute folly to God. The meaning of the place is, Job did not make any unworthy reflection upon God for the evils he suffered by his providence, as if anything were wanting in his care or wisdom. Fifthly, Thou mayest not only deprecate these evils in thy afflictions, but pray believingly for a happy issue out of them. The darkest lane of suffering shall, to the saint, have a lightsome end. 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy,' James v. 11. This is what God intends in all his saints' troubles, and he takes pleasure in thinking of it beforehand; 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace,' Jer. xxix. 11. And that petition comes in a happy time to court, which finds the king thinking of the very business.

Section II.—The second kind of suffering is eternal; this is the centre in which all the lines of sin and misery meet, the common sheol into which they all disgorge themselves, as rivers do their streams into the ocean; and as rivers when they are fallen into the sea, lose their several names in one that comprehends them all, the ocean; so all the evils of this life, when resolved into this, forget their private names,—sickness, pain, poverty, &c., and are called hell: not that these are all formally and literally there, but virtually, in that the tor-

Digitized by Google

ment of the damned doth not only amount to, but beyond expression exceeds them all: as in heaven there is no wordly cheer, yet a feast,—no silks and satins, yet all glorious robes, and, indeed, that which is infinitely of more value, and worth than the most precious things the earth can boast of; so the great miseries of this life are incomparably less than the least torment of hell: never can any creature say he is completely miserable, till the jaws of that infernal pit enclose him; there is the sinner's easeless, endless state; he shall continue for ever in the hight of his paroxysm; no change of weather, or hope of clearing, but perpetual storm set in to rain fire and brimstone upon him to all eternity. Now, in deprecating this we should endeavour to keep this threefold notion in our thoughts, for which, above all, we are to desire to be delivered from it. First, Conceive of hell as a state of sin as well as of suffering, yea, in its utmost height. Earth is a midle place between heaven and hell: neither sin in the wicked, nor grace in the saint, come here to their full ripeness; grace being an outlandish slip brought from heaven's paradise, rises not to its just height till it be transplanted to its native climate from whence it came. And sin being a child of hell, comes not to its full complexion till it be sent back to the place it came from. Here poor wretches are enticed to sin by the pleasure it promiseth, but there they sin out of malice, for nothing else can invite them. On earth the sinner conceals the venom which is in his heart; but in hell he spits it out in blasphemies against Heaven: in a word, here he sins with wavering thoughts, and some weak purposes of repenting; but there he is as desperate as the devil himself, hardened beyond all relenting. Certainly, the saints, to whom the motions of sin in this life are so grievous, above all the crosses and losses that befall them, and who count a few years' neighbourhood among the wicked so great an affliction that they cry, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech and dwell in the tents of Kedar,' must needs deprecate that dismal state with their utmost vehemency of spirit, wherein they should be everlastingly yoked with sin, and cooped up with unclean sinners. It was the speech of a gracious woman, when near her death, 'O Lord, send me not to hell among such filthy company, which thou knowest I have not liked on earth.' But as for those who can agree so well with their lusts and the company of the wicked here, I know not how they can thus deprecate that place where they shall meet with that which pleaseth them so much on earth. David first protests his abhorrence of the ways and society of the wicked,—'I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers: I have hated the congregation of evil-doers and will not sit with the wicked,' Psa. xxvi. 4, 5; then his zeal for God, and the delight he had in his house to praise and serve him, ver. 6, 8; after which he breaks out into his prayer, ver. 6, 'Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men.' As if he had said, I abhor their society in my life, O let me not be sent amongst them at my death. I have praised thee on earth; send me not to blaspheme thee in hell. I have loved the habitation of thy house, let me not dwell with unclean spirits hereafter. Secondly, Hell is a state of separation from the blissful presence of God; pray to be delivered from it under this notion, as it is the everlasting excommunication of the creature from God: 'Go, ye cursed!' that is, never to see my sweet face any more; called therefore 'outer darkness' because there is not the least beam of his favour to enlighten the souls of the damned, nor the least crevice left open for hope to expect it. The heat of hell fire is not so dismal as the want of this light; this makes them cursed. 'Go ye cursed!' The curse lies in their departure from God, the fountain of blessing; all beside this were tolerable; would God cast but one kind look upon those miserable souls, as they swim in this lake, it were able to change the property of the place, and the joy thereof were enough to take away the sense of their torments. The three worthies in Daniel could walk in the fire, having God to bear them company, as if they had been only in the sunshine. That which a saint prizeth most in heaven is the presence of God; 'So shall we ever be with the Lord,' 1 Thess. iv. 17; and hell is most dreaded by them, because a gulf is fixed between the souls in it and God, that no communion can be had with him to all eternity. O how few pray against hell under this notion! How few cry out with David, 'Cast me not away from thy presence!' Psa. li. 11. If this were the thing, above all, they feared should befall them in the other world, would they so willingly live without

Digitized by Google

acquaintance with God in this? Surely not. Thirdly, Hell is a state wherein the damned can never actually satisfy God's justice; for their debt being infinite, and they but finate, they will ever be paying, but the last farthing can never be paid, which is the only reason they lie for ever in prison. But Christ, the saints' paymaster, discharged their whole debt at once, and took in the bond, which he nailed to his cross, leaving no back reckoning unpaid, to bring the believer afterward into any danger from the hands of Divine justice. Now as an ingenious debtor desires his freedom at his creditor's hands, that thereby he may be capable of paying his debt, as well as to escape the misery that himself should endure by his imprisonment; so an ingenious soul (and such is every saint) deprecates hell, as well with an eye to God's glory, as to his own ease and happiness. Oh, saith he, send me not to blaspheme thee among that wretched crew of damned souls and unclean spirits, when I so much desire to join with the choir of holy angels and saints in singing hallelujahs to thy holy and glorious name.

CHAPTER LVI.

OF IMPRECATORY PRAYER AND HOW TO BE PERFORMED.

The third branch in petitionary prayer is imprecation. A kind of prayer this is, wherein the Christian imprecates the vengeance of God upon the enemies of God and his people: on such a solemn errand are the saints' prayers sometimes sent to heaven, and speed as effectually as when they go to obtain blessings for themselves and the church of God. And no wonder, for they are perfumed with Christ's merits, and thereby are as acceptable to God as any other put up in his name. 'And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God,' Rev. viii. 4. Now what kind of prayers these were is clear by the next words, 'And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth, and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.' By which is signified the dreadful judgments which God, in answer to his saints' prayers, would bring upon the wicked, whose bloody persecutions of the church, and fury against the truth of God, made the saints to cry to heaven for vengeance upon them; and it should inevitably come, as thunder, lightning, and earthquakes, that can be resisted by no power or policy of the greatest monarch on earth. Thus, as at the firing of cannon planted against a city, you may see its wall come tumbling down, so upon the prayers of the saints, great judgments were certainly to befall the enemies of God and his church. Now, the path wherein the Christian is here to tread being very narrow, he is to be the more cautious that he steps not awry. He is in this like one that drives a chariot on the brow of a steep hill, who, if he hath not a quick eye and steady hand, may soon be lost. The highest strains of the saint's duty run nearest the most dangerous precipices, as the most mysterious truths are soonest perverted into the most damnable errors. I shall therefore lay down a few particulars, which may serve as a rail to encompass the Christian in this duty, for the better securing him from falling into any miscarriage about it.

SECTION I.—Take heed thou dost not make thy private particular enemies the object of thy imprecation: we have no warrant, when any wrong us, to go and call fire from heaven upon them. We are bid indeed to, heap coals upon the enemy's head,' but they are of love, not of wrath and revenge. Job set a black brand upon this, and clears himself from the imputation of so great a sin'—'If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him: neither have I suffered my mouth to sin, by wishing a curse to his soul,' chap. xxxi. 29, 30. He durst not wish his enemy ill, much less deliberately form a wish into a prayer, and desire God to curse him. Our Saviour hath taught us a more excellent way, Matt. v. 44.: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.' I know this is counted a poor, sheepish spirit by many. What! go and pray for them? No, send them the glove rather, and be revenged on them in a duel, by shedding their blood. This is the drink-offering which these sons of pride delight to pour out to their revenge, or else curse them to the pit of hell with their oaths. O tremble at such a spirit as this!

Digitized by Google

The ready way to fetch a curse from heaven on thyself is to imprecate one sinfully upon another, Psalm cix. 17, 18: 'As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garments, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones.' Moses, I suppose, had as noble a spirit as any of these that style themselves men of honour, yet did he draw his sword upon Aaron, or curse Miriam, when they had used him so ill? I trow not, but bore all patiently; nay, when God declared his displeasure against Miriam for this affront put upon him, see how this holy man interceded for her with God, Numb. xii. 13. This is valour of the right make, to overcome evil with good, and instead of seeking revenge on him that wrongs us, to have the mastery of our own corruption so far as to desire his good the more. Thus our Lord, when he was numbered amongst transgressors, even then interceded for the transgressors, Isa. liii. 12; that is, those very men who used him so barbarously, while they were digging his heart out of his body with their instruments of cruelty, then was he begging the life of their souls with his fervent prayers. Secondly, when thou prayest against the enemies of God and his church, direct thy prayers rather against their plots than against their persons. Thus the apostles,—'And now, Lord, behold their threatenings,' Acts iv. 29; not, Confound their persons, but, 'Behold their threatenings,' and so they leave their case with the Lord to set it right for them. So David, 2 Sam. xv. 31: 'O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.' Indeed, God did no more, he destroyed plot and plotter also, and in this sense the saints may often say with the prophet, 'Thou hast done terrible things, we looked not for,' and prayed not for, by pouring out his vengeance on the persons, when they have only prayed against their wicked designs. Thirdly, When praying against the persons of those that are open enemies to God and his church, it is safest to pray indefinitely. 'Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion,' Psalm cxxix. 5; because we know not who of them are implacable, and who not, and therefore cannot pray peremptorily against particular persons. There may be an elect vessel for a time in open hostility against God and his church, whom afterwards God may consecrate to himself by converting grace, and so make him a holy vessel for the use of his sanctuary. We do, it is confessed, find some in Scripture prayed against by name,—Moses prayed against Korah and his accomplices, Numb. xvi., and Paul against Alexander the coppersmith,—'The Lord reward him according to his works;' but these, and others in Scripture, had an extraordinary spirit, and are not to be patterns for us in this case. Elias called fire from heaven upon the captains, but the disciples were soundly rebuked for a preposterous imitation of his act, who had not his spirit,—'Ye know not what spirit ye are of.' Pray thou for vengeance against all the implacable enemies of God, and leave him to direct thy arrow to its mark. Ahab was hit, though the arrow was shot at a venture. Prayers are sorted in heaven before their answer returns. Some of those emperors for whom the church in the primitive times prayed, yet proving implacable enemies to God and his people, felt the weight of those imprecations which, in general, they put up against the adversaries of the truth. Fourthly, In praying against the implacable enemies of God and his church, the glory of God should be principally aimed at, and vengeance implored on them in order to advance that. 'Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered.' 'As the sun, when it hath dispelled the vapours that muffled it up from our sight, breaks out in the glory of its beams, so God, by taking vengeance on his enemies, and scattering them in their wicked imaginations, with which they endeavoured to obscure his glory, doth display the splendour of his attributes before his people's eyes. The saddest consequence which attends the success of God's enemies in the world is their pride and blasphemy against him, his truth, and church. Then they belch out their horrid blasphemies against Heaven, that they mock the poor saints, while they say unto them, 'Where is now your God?' But when God takes to himself power and strength, and confounds these by bringing destruction upon their heads in the midst of their wicked enterprises; when he recoils their own plots upon themselves, making them go off like a pistol in their pocket, to procure their own death and ruin; now the reproach is taken off, and they have an answer given home to their question, 'Where is now your God?' He is at their throat with his sword of vengeance vindicating his

Digitized by Google

glorious name upon them. When Julian the Apostate was slain (and confessed at whose hand he received his fatal blow), then Libanius, his scoffing sophister, had his question, What is the Carpenter's Son now doing? (which a little before he had put to a Christian, in derision of his Saviour), thrown into his teeth to the confusion of his face, and found the Christian's answer, that he was making a coffin for his master, proved more true than he was aware of. It cannot but be a joyful day to a saint, who prizeth the honour of his God above his own life, when he sees even the wicked, that before denied a providence, and thought all events were thrown out of blind fortune's lap, as if the world were but a lottery, wherein every one had his portion by chance, now forced, by the remarkable appearances of God's power and wisdom, in saving his people, and destroying his implacable enemies, to confess, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth;' Psalm lviii. 11. This exaltation of the glorious name of God, every saint doth and should aim at in the prayers wherein he imprecates vengeance: 'Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish; that men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over the earth,' Psalm lxxxiii. 17.

Section II.—Now, from this imprecatory prayer, there is,—First, Matter of comfort to the saints against those direful imprecations which the wicked world throweth out against them. The saints in this sense are a cursed people. The wicked form the greatest part of the world; the church is a little flock, but her enemies a huge herd: and Cain will hate and kill Abel to the end of the world: the same spirit that was in him remaineth in his seed. Sometimes when the church of God flourisheth, and hath the sun of outward prosperity on her side, they may cry Hosannah in the crowd, 'But when they bless with their mouth, they curse inwardly with their heart.' A wicked man cannot wish well to a saint, as a saint; neither can a saint bless the wicked as such: Psalm cxxix. 8, 'Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord.' They, do, indeed, desire their conversion, and therein wish them well, but in the wicked way they are at present, they cannot bless them: so the wicked desire the saints would come over to their party, do as they do, and then they would applaud them; but let the saints keep close to God, and refuse to run into riot and excess with them, and they are sure to meet with their curse and imprecation; it is not their unblamable and peacable walking will free them from their wrath and fury; Jer. xv. 10, 'I have neither lent on usury, nor have men lent me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.' But fear not thou, who art a saint, their imprecations; this is but like false fire in the pan of an uncharged gun, it gives a crack, but hurts not; God's blessings will cover thee from their curse: 'Let them curse, but bless thou,' Psalm cix. 28. When the viper flew out of the fire upon Paul's hand, the barbarians expected that he should drop down dead, but it proved no such matter. Thus the enemies of God and his people have expected, one generation after another, that the church, which hath been always laden with their curses, should perish under them, but it lives yet to walk over all their graves. Alas! poor wretches, what is your imprecation worth? Truly, as your blessing can do no good, neither can your curse do any harm, till you can get God to set his seal, and say amen to it. Did our Saviour so sharply rebuke the rash request of his disciples, calling for fire to fall on those whom they thought deserved it:—and will he gratify the lust of your devilish fury against his own dear people, by pouring on them what you blasphemously desire of him? Will nothing serve you but to have God execute those whom you condemn; and those, his dear children, for nought else, but because they dare not be as wicked as yourselves? Go, bid the tender mother imbrue her hands in the blood of her sweet babe, that came out of her womb, and now lies at her breast; or the husband betray and deliver the wife of his bosom into the hands of murderers that wait for her life; would these be errands to make the messenger that brings them welcome to the loving mother or husband? But if any such monsters among men are to be found, remember he is a God whose nature is unchangeable, and whose covenant with his people is inviolable. How was God courted by Balak and Balaam with altar after altar, from place to place, but all to no purpose; Deut. xxiii. 5, 'Nevertheless the Lord thy God would not hearken unto Balaam,

Digitized by Google

but the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee. Never was any design carried on with more zeal and passionate desire to effect it, than this; one would think that God had said enough to Balaam at first, to make him sick of his enterprise; Numb. xxii. 12, 'Thou shalt not go with them, thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed.' But he liked the work, and loved the wages, and therefore baffles his conscience, not telling the messengers all that God said to him, and they also report not all to Balak what Balaam said to them, so fearful were both the work should fail; yet we see by the event, that they took but pains to lose their labour, nay, worse to lose themselves! for God made them, and him that set them on, to drink the curse which they would so fain have brewed for Israel. Secondly, A word to the wicked. Take heed, that by your implacable hatred to the truth and church of God, you do not engage her prayers against you. The imprecatory prayers of the saints, when shot at the right mark, are murdering pieces, and strike dead where they light. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily,' Luke xviii. 7, 8. They are not empty words, as the imprecations of the wicked poured into the air, and vanish with their breath, but are received into heaven, and shall be sent back with thunder and lightning upon the wicked. David's prayer unravelled Ahithophel's fine-spun policy, and twisted his halter for him. The prayers of the saints are more to be feared than an army of twenty thousand men in the field. Esther's fast hastened Haman's ruin, and Hezekiah's prayer against Sennacherib, brought his huge host to the slaughter.

CHAPTER LVII.

OF GRATULATORY PRAYER.

THE second kind of prayer is thanksgiving; in handling whereof I shall, First, Shew what we are to praise and thank God for. Now, the object of thanksgiving, as of request, is something that is good, but under another notion: we ask what we want, we bless and praise God for the mercies we have received, or for the hope we have from the promise that we shall receive them. So that we see the Christian hath as large a field for the exercise of his thankfulness as he hath in the petitionary part of prayer for his desires. This duty circumscribes heaven and earth. As God does nothing, but he aims at his own glory thereby, Prov. xvi. 4; so there is no act of God toward his people, wherein he intends not their good, and as such becomes the subject of their thanksgiving. Hence we are bid, 'In everything give thanks.' O, what a copious theme hath God given his people to enlarge their meditations upon? *In everything.* The whole course of Divine Providence toward the saints is like a music-book, in every leaf whereof there is a song ready set for them, to learn and sing to the praise of their God; there is no passage in their life of which they can say, In this we received no mercy for which we should bless our God. Now, as partial obedience is not good, so partial thanks is worthless: not that any saint is able to keep all the commands, or reckon up all the mercies of God, much less return particular acknowledgment for every single mercy; but as he hath 'respect unto all the commandments,' Psa. cxix. 6, so he desires to value highly every mercy, and to his utmost power give God the praise of all: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?' Psa. cxvi. 12. This is an honest soul indeed, he would not conceal any debt he owes to God, but calls his soul to an account for all his benefits. The skipping over one note in a lesson may spoil the grace of the music; unthankfulness for one mercy disparageth our thanks for the rest. But to sort the mercies of God into several ranks, that you may see more distinctly your work in this duty lie before you:—

First, Mercies are either ordinary or extraordinary—our common necessaries, or the remarkable supplies which we receive now and then at the hand of God. Thou must not only praise him for some extraordinary mercy, that comes with such pomp and observation, that all thy neighbours take notice of it with thee, as the mercy which Zacharias and Elizabeth had in their son, that was noised about all the country, Luke i. 65; but also for ordinary, every-day mercies: for first, we are unworthy of the least mercy, Gen. xxxii. 10, and therefore God is

Digitized by Google

worthy of praise for the least, because it is more than he owes us. Secondly, these common, ordinary mercies are many. Thus David enhanceth the mercies of this kind,—'O God, how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand; when I wake, I am still with thee,' Psa. cxxxix. 17, 18. As if he had said, There is not a point of time wherein thou art not doing me good; as soon as I open my eyes in the morning, I have a new theme, in some fresh mercies given since I closed them over-night, to employ my praiseful meditations. Many little items make together a great sum. What is lighter than a grain of sand, yet what is heavier than the sand on the sea shore? As little sins (such as vain thoughts and idle words), because of their multitude, arise to a great guilt, and will bring in a long bill, a heavy reckoning at last; so, ordinary mercies, what they want in their size of some other great mercies, have compensated it in their number. Who will not say that a man shews greater kindness in maintaining one at his table with ordinary fare all the year, than in entertaining him at a great feast twice or thrice in the same time? Thirdly, the sincerity of the heart is seen more in thankfulness for ordinary mercies than extraordinary. As it shews a bad heart upon every ordinary occasion to fall into a sin, so it proves that soul very gracious that takes the hint of every common mercy to bless his God. Some can digest little afflictions, and swallow ordinary mercies, without mourning for the one, or praising God for the other. That is the upright heart, which little chastisements humble, and ordinary mercies raise to thankfulness. Secondly, Mercies are complete, or imperfect. We must not make God stay for our praises till he hath finished a mercy, but praise him at the beginning; we should be as ready to return our praises for a mercy, as God is to hear our prayers when begging it. Now God comes forth early to meet a praying soul: 'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth,' Dan. ix. 23. 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin,' Psa. xxxii. 5. Thus should we echo our thankfulness to the first intimation that God gives in his providence of an approaching mercy. The birds rise betimes in the morning, saluting the rising sun with their sweet notes. Thus should we praise God at the first appearance of a mercy. Moses did not promise God, when he had saved them from Pharaoh's wrath and the waves of the sea, that at his landing them safe in Canaan, then he would praise him for all his mercies together; no, but he pens a song on the bank, within sight of the howling wilderness, which they were to enter into; he sings it with Israel in thankfulness for this first deliverance after their march out of Egypt. So, 2 Sam. vi. 13, 'And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings;' that is, as soon as they had proceeded a few steps, perceiving that God graciously favoured their enterprise, they expressed their thankfulness upon the place, for this hopeful beginning, well knowing no way was better to engage God in the continuance and enlargement of his mercy. Thus, the Jews in Babylon, when their deliverance began to break out, are at their praises, Psa. cxxvi. 2, 'Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then said they among the heathen, 'The Lord hath done great things for them.' Although their deliverance only began to dawn, and their affairs looked with a more smiling face: yet now they salute their infant mercy with joy and thankfulness. May be, Christian, thou art upon a sick bed, and some little reviving thou hast, though far from thy former health; O, bless God for this little lift. May be thou hast been, as to thy spiritual state, in great distress, swallowed up with terrors from the Lord, but now thy agony abates; though the Comforter be not come, yet thou hast some strictures of Divine light let into thy dungeon, that raise a little hope to wait for more; O, let not this mercy pass without some thankful acknowledgment. Some, alas! are like great ships, that cannot be set afloat but with the high water of a mercy completed; if they have not all they wish for, they cannot see what they have, nor tune their hearts into a peaceful frame. Thirdly, Mercies are such as are received in this life, or reserved for the next. There are promises which God will have us stay for until we come to heaven; and these we are to praise God for, as well as what we receive here. The more our hearts are enlarged in thankfulness for these mercies, which we have only in hope, the more honour we put upon his

Digitized by Google

faithful promise. When a bill of exchange is paid at sight, it shews the merchant to be a man of credit and ability. By the joy thou takest up, and the thankfulness thou layest out for what the bare promise tells thee thou shalt at death receive, thou glorifiest the truth of God, who is the promiser. Fourthly, There are bitter mercies and sweet mercies; some mercies God gives in wine, some in wormwood: now, we must praise God for the bitter mercies as well as the sweet; thus Job, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Too many are prone to think nothing is a mercy that is not sweet, and leaves a pleasant farewell on their palate; but this is the childishness of our spirits, which, as the Christian grows more judicious, will wear off. Truly, none of our temporals (whether crosses or enjoyments), considered in themselves abstractedly, are either a curse or a mercy; they are only as the covering to the book; it is what is written in them that must resolve us whether they be a mercy or not. Is it an affliction that lies on thee? If thou canst find it comes from love, and ends in grace and holiness, it is a mercy, though it be bitter to thy taste. Is it an enjoyment? If love doth not send it, and grace end it, it is a curse, though sweet to thy sense. There are sweet poisons as well as bitter cordials. The saints commonly have greater advantage from their afflictions in the world, than enjoyments of the world; their eyes are oftener enlightened with wormwood than honey,—those dispensations that are bitter and unpleasing to sense, than those that are sweet and luscious. Fifthly, Mercies are either personal, or such as we receive in partnership with others, and both must be recognised. Haply, Christian, thou hast prayed for a sick friend, and he is restored to health; for another in distress of spirit, and the Comforter at last has come to him. Now, thou who hadst an adventure in him, hast a mercy also in the return that is made to him, and therefore art to bless God with him. He that prays for his friend, and joins not with him in thankfulness when the mercy is given, is like one that is a means to bring his friend into debt, but takes no care to help him out. Thy friend, Christian, needs thy aid much more to pay the thanks, than to borrow the mercy, because this is the harder work of the two. But above all mercies to others, be sure not to forget the mercies granted to the church and nation.

CHAPTER LVIII.

FOUR DIRECTIONS HOW TO FRAME OUR THANKSGIVINGS.

You have heard what is the subject of our praises and thanksgivings. We come now to lay down some rules how we are to frame our thanksgivings.

SECTION I.—First, be sure the thing thou praisest God for be found among the good things of the promise; that is the compass by which we are to steer our course: if it be not in the promise, it is not a mercy, and so not the subject of thanksgiving. When some prosper in their wickedness, they are so bold as to thank God they succeeded so well. Now, if it be a grievous sin for a man to bless himself in any wicked way, Deut. xxix. 19, how much more horrid is it to bless God for prospering him therein! By the former he only avoucheth his own sin, but by the other he makes God a party with him. Bernard compares those who thank God for their success in wickedness, to hypocrites who praise him for the good things they receive. The one impute their sin to God, the other ascribe the glory of his mercies to themselves. God cannot accept thy praise, unless he first approve thy act. He that receives a bribe is guilty of the fault. And dare you thus to tempt the Holy One? If the God you serve were like the heathen idols, it would not much matter. When the Philistines had practised their cruelty on Saul, they presented his head to their god. The devil desires no better sacrifice than the fruit of men's sins. But the Holy One of Israel abhors all wicked praises; the hire of a whore was not to be offered, Deut. xxiii. 18. Secondly, Let all your praises be offered up in Christ; 'By him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God,' Heb. xiii. 15: 'Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,' 1 Pet. ii. 5. Couldst thou pen ever so rare a panegyric, couldst thou flourish it with ever so much art, and deliver it with the greatest zeal possible, all would be harsh, and grate the Almighty's ear, except sounded through Christ. Possibly, when thou prayest for a mercy, thou shelterest thyself under Christ's wing, and

Digitized by Google

usest his name to procure thy admission, (because conscious of thine own unworthiness to receive what thou askest:) but when thou praisest God, thy errand being to give, thou expectest to be made welcome; for he that brings a present, shall surely find the door open. Yes, if thy gift were suitable to the great God: but who art thou, that the great God should take a present at thy hand? If thou be not worthy of the least mercy thou beggest, then surely thou art unworthy of this honour to have thy thank-offering accepted. Thou needest Christ's mediation for the one as much as the other. Thirdly, Descend to the particular instances of God's mercy toward thee in thy thanksgiving. It betrays a negligent spirit, if not a false, when in confession of sin we content ourselves with a general indictment,—I am a sinner, a great sinner, and there to stop without a particular sense of the several breaches made in the law of God. Neither is it a better symptom, when a man puts God off with a compliment for his goodness and mercy in general, but takes no notice of the particular items which make up the total sum. To do this, it will be necessary that thou takest special notice of God's daily providences, lay up these in thy heart for matter of thanksgiving against the time of prayer. You do not expect to find that money in your chest which you never laid there; neither will you find in your heart to praise God for those mercies which you never committed to your memory. When the Psalmist had exhorted men to be thankful for the mercies of God in creation and providence, his conclusion is worthy of remark,—'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord:' as if he had said, The reason why so little praise is given for such great mercies is, because men see not the loving-kindness of God in them; and they see not his loving-kindness, nor observe his mercies, because they have not wisdom. It is not a library that makes a scholar, but wisdom to observe and gather the choice notions out of its books. None want mercies to bless God for. Divine Providence is a large volume, written thick and close with mercies from one end of our life to the other; but, few, alas! have a heart to read in it, and fewer have wisdom to collect the choice passages of it for such a holy purpose as this.

Section II.—Fourthly, Excite thy praising graces. David stirs up all that is within him to praise God, Psa. ciii.; that is, all the powers and graces of his soul. First, Humility: a proud man cannot well tell how to beg, yet necessity may make him stoop to it; but in thankfulness he must needs be a bungler, for this is a high piece of self-denial. 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise.' The proud man's gift will cleave to his hand. He is unfit to set the crown on God's head that hath a mind to wear it himself. We find, indeed, the tool in the Pharisee's hand, but he cuts his work into chips; he seems to honour God with his mouth, but eats his words as he speaks them, and discovers plainly that he intends to exalt himself rather than God;—'I thank God I am not as this publican.' This, 'I thank God,' comes in *pro forma*; it is the publican that he disdains, and himself that he applauds. You may easily think what a look ambitious Haman gave Mordecai, when he held his stirrup, who desired himself to have been in the saddle. How, alas! can a proud heart give God that which he covets himself? Labour, therefore, to vilify thyself; then, and not till then, thou wilt magnify thy God. As there is no one so zealous in begging as he that is most pinched for want, so there is no one so hearty in his thanks as he that hath most sense of his unworthiness: and who can think much of himself that is thoroughly acquainted with himself? If God had not set thee up, what stock couldst thou have found of thy own? Naked camest thou into the world, and ever since thou hast been cast upon thy God, even as a poor child upon the parish. What hast thou earned by all the service thou hast done him? Not the bread of thy poorest meal. And art thou yet proud? Bernard compares Joseph's carriage with his master, and the grateful souls with God, thus together: Joseph, saith the father, knew that his master put all he had into his hands, except his wife, and therefore accounted it too base an ingratitude to take her from his master's bed, who had been so kind to him. Thus, saith he, God freely gives his mercies into the saints' hands, but excepts his glory; therefore the gracious soul takes what God gives thankfully, but humbly leaves the praise of them, which God reserves for himself. Secondly, Love and joy. First, Love; this is an affection that cannot keep within doors,

Digitized by Google

but must be sallying forth in the praises of God. In heaven we shall have nothing to do but to behold the face of God, and seeing him, we shall love him; loving him, we shall praise him; and praising, we shall sing and rejoice. Love and thankfulness are like the symbolical qualities of the elements, easily resolved into each other. Psa. cxvi. 1, David begins with, 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice;' and to enkindle this grace into a greater flame, he records the mercies of God in some following verses; which done, then he is in the right mood for praise; ver. 11: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?' The spouse, when thoroughly awake, pondering with herself what a friend had been at her door, and how his sweet company was lost through her unkindness shakes off her sloth, riseth, and away she goes after him; now, when by running after her beloved, she had put her soul into a heat of love, she breaks out in praising him from top to toe, Cant. v. 10. That is the acceptable praising which comes from a warm heart; and the saint must use some holy exercise to stir up his habit of love, which like natural heat in the body, is preserved and increased by motion. Secondly, Excite thy joy; Psa. lxiii. 5: 'My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips.' The disciples for sorrow could not hold open their eyes to pray, much more were they unfit to praise: this, indeed, makes the duty of praise and thanksgiving more difficult than to pray, because our joy here is so often interrupted with intervening sins and sorrows, that this heavenly fire seldom burns long clear on the Christian's altar, from which his praise should ascend. Temptations and afflictions drive the soul to prayer, and dispose it more for prayer; but they untune his instrument for praise. Hannah, she wept and prayed, but durst not eat of the peace-offering, the sacrifice of praise. It behoves us, therefore, the more to watch our hearts, lest they be indisposed by any affliction for this duty. Art thou under affliction, let not thy soul pore too long on thy troubles, but bring it within scent of God's mercies, that are intermingled with them. Sit near this fire of God's love in Christ, warm thyself with meditation on spiritual promises, while thou art under bodily pressures, and thou shalt find, through God's blessing, thy heart comfortable to praise him. Thus, Psa. lvii. 7, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.'

CHAPTER LIX.

FOUR MORE RULES TO BE OBSERVED IN THE DUTY.

FIFTHLY, Content not thyself with a bare narrative, but give every mercy its proper accent. There is a great difference in two that sing the same song; from one you have only the plain song, the other descants and runs upon it, in which consists the grace of music. The mercies of God affect our hearts; as they are dressed forth, if we put on them the circumstances that advance them, they appear glorious to our eyes, and enlarge our hearts in praise for them; but considered without these, we pass them slightly. God himself, when he would express the height of his love to his people, presents them to his own eye, not as they are now, but as clothed with the glory he intends them: 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall the Lord rejoice over thee.' Thus do thou, to draw out thy thankfulness for mercies, consider them in those circumstances that may render them most glorious in thine eye. Truly, careless praises disfigure the lovely face of God's mercy:—'The works of the Lord are sought out of them that have pleasure in them.' The skilful limner studies the face of the man before he makes his draught. Praise is a work not easily done; read, therefore, the word, and learn from the saints what circumstances they have observed in recognising their mercies; sometimes we have them setting the accent upon the speedy return of their prayers—'In the day that I cried, thou answeredst me;' this superadds a further excellency to the mercy: it was but knock and have; come, and be served. While the church were at God's door praying for Peter's deliverance, Peter is knocking at theirs, to tell them their prayer is heard. Sometimes from the sinful infirmities which mingle with their prayers; now, that mercy should come notwithstanding these, and steal upon them when they had hardly faith to wait, hath exceedingly endeared the goodness of God to them. 'I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?' Psalm cxvi. 12. Sometimes from the

Digitized by Google

greatness of their strait,—'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. O taste, and see that the Lord is good:' Psa. xxxiv. 6, 8. So, Psa. cxxxvi. 23, 'Who remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever.' Indeed, this must needs raise high thoughts of the mercy. The water that God gave Israel out of the rock is called honey, because it came in their extreme want, and so was as sweet to them as honey. Sometimes, from the frequent returns of God's goodness, and expressions of his care, his mercies 'are new every morning,' Lam. iii. 23; 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' 1 Sam. vii. 12. This gives such an accent, as without it the mercy cannot be pronounced with its due emphasis. A course of sin is worse than an act of sin, Jer. xxiii. 10: 'Their course is evil:' so the course of mercy, from time to time, speaks more love. Sometimes from the peculiarity of the mercy, Psa. cxlvii. 20: 'He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.' 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' John xiv. 22. Without this, we rob God of the best part of our sacrifice; as if a Jew had stripped off the fat, and laid the lean on God's altar. The mercies thou receivest are great and rich; give not him thy beggarly praises; he expects they should bear some proportion to his mercy; 'Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness,' Psa. cl. 2.

Section I.—Sixthly, Distinguish between mercy and mercy; let the choicest mercies have the highest praises. It shews a bad heart to make a great noise in prayer for corn and wine, and to be faint in the desire for Christ and his grace; nor is it any better when one acknowledges the goodness of God in temporals, but takes little notice of those greater blessings which concern another life. You may hear sometimes a covetous earth-worm say, What a blessed season it is for the fruits of the earth; but you never hear him express any feeling sense of the blessed seasons of grace: the miracle of God's patience, that such a wretch as he is should remain out of hell so long; the infinite love of God in Christ;—he turns these over as a child does the leaves of a book, till he hits on some picture, and there stays to gaze. Christ and his grace he cares not for, except they would fill his bags and barns. Now, shall such a one pass for a thankful man? Will God accept his praises for earth, that rejects heaven?—that takes corn and wine with thanks, and bids him keep Christ to himself with scorn; saying, as Esau, when his brother offered him his present, 'I have enough.' A gracious heart is of another strain; Eph. i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' Indeed, God gives temporals to make us in love with spirituals, yea, with himself that gives them. Again, as we are to distinguish between mercy and mercy, so even in these lower mercies that concern this life, be sure thou layest the accent of thy thankfulness on the spiritual part of them. In every outward mercy, there is food for the flesh, and food for the spirit; that which pleaseth the sense, and that which may exercise our grace. Is it health? The carnal heart is taken most with it, as it brings the joy of his natural life to him, which sickness deprived him off. But that which above all pleaseth a saint, is the opportunity that comes with it for his glorifying God: Psa. xlii. 11, 'I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' Is it an estate that God casts in? The carnal wretch values it for his private accommodation. But the gracious soul blesseth God, who affords him the means of providing for the necessities of others, and counts a large heart to be a greater mercy than a full purse. David did not bless himself in his abundance, but blessed God that gave him heart to refund it again into the bosom of God, from whom he received it; 1 Chron. xxix. 14: 'But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?' Seventhly, Let not thy praises be transient,—a fit of music, and then the instrument hung up, till another remarkable providence makes thee take it down. God will not sit at such a niggard's table, as invites him to a thanksgiving feast once for all the year. God comes not as a guest to his saints' house, but to dwell with them: he inhabits the praises of his people, Psa. xxii. 3. That day in which thou dost not bless God, thou turnest him out of doors. David saith, 'As long as I live will I praise thee.' 'A lying tongue is but for a

Digitized by Google

moment,' saith Solomon, Prov. xii. 19. Something drops from a liar within awhile that discovers his falsehood; the tongue that lies in praising God, is thus for a moment; he can curse God with that tongue to-morrow with which he praiseth him to-day.

SECTION II.—Eighthly, Thou must not only continue, but grow in thy praises; as the tide increaseth, the ship is lifted the higher on the water; as your crop increaseth, your barns are enlarged; as your bodies grow, so you make your clothes bigger. Every day swells the tide of your mercies, adds to your heap, increases your treasure, and heightens your stature: 'They are new every morning,' Lam. iii. 23; they grow whether thou sleepest or wakest. Now, as the coat thou didst wear when a child, would not become thee now thou art a man; so neither will the garment of praise which thou didst clothe thyself with when a young convert, become thee now thou art an old disciple; thou standest deeper in God's books than before, and God expects according to what every man hath received. You would not let a farm now by the rate it bore fifty years ago. Why then may not God raise the rent of his mercies? Look back, and see how well the world is mended with thee since thou first set up: may be, thou canst say, with Jacob, 'I passed over with my staff, and behold now I am become two bands.' Well, see what thou hast more, in health, estate, in gifts, graces, or comforts, than thou hadst formerly, and then compare thy present thankfulness with what it was before these additions were made to thy treasure. The more free God is of his mercy, the more close some are in their thankful returns: when poor they could be thankful for a short meal of coarse fare, more than now for their varieties. When sick, O how thankful were their hearts for a few broken slumbers in the night! whereas now they can rise and take little notice of the goodness of God, that gives them their full rest night after night. Is it not strange to see a man grow colder in his love to God, as the sun of God's mercy riseth higher, and shines hotter upon him? O, it is sad to see the heap increase, and the heart waste: to find a man grow richer in mercy, and poorer in thankfulness.

CHAPTER LX.

THE TWO LAST DIRECTIONS IN THE DUTY OF THANKSGIVING.

NINTHLY, Let thy praises be real; words pay no debts. There goes more to thankfulness than a mouthful of windy praises, which pass away with the sound. A gracious heart is too wise to think God will be put off with a song; he will give God, that, but it is the least he intends. 'The Lord is my strength and song,—and I will prepare him an habitation,' Exod. xv. 2. Thankfulness is costly work: 'Shall I offer to God that which cost me nothing?' saith David. Cheap praises are easily obtained; but when it is attended with any expense, then many grow sick of it. The Jews could 'sing' when delivered from Babylon, Psa. cxxi.; but it was long before they could find in their hearts 'to build God an habitation;' the time was not come for that: they might have said, their heart was not come; they had money and time enough to build their own, but none for God, though herein they acted foolishly, for as fast as they built at one end, God pulled down at the other. Some in our time, instead of erecting God an habitation, and assisting our nation to build synagogues, have pulled them down, and carried the beams to their own houses, Excellent artists, in taking down ministers, and their maintenance, whereby the gospel should be upheld! If this be the way to thrive, God gave his people but ill counsel when he said, 'Consider now from this day—I will bless you,' Hag. ii. 18, 19.

SECTION I.—First, Then are our praises acceptable, when they are sincere; 'All that is within me bless his holy name,' Psa. ciii. 1; when his mercies beget high and honourable thoughts of God in our hearts. We read of cursing God in the heart, Job i. 5, which is done when we have low thoughts of his greatness and goodness; on the contrary, when the mercies of God imprint such an image in the heart as lively represents his attributes, then thou blessest God in thy heart, by adoring his majesty, reverencing his holiness, delighting in his love, and fearing his goodness; here is real thankfulness. Now, as the glass represents the image of the person who looks on it, so the thankful soul

Digitized by Google

reflects those glorious attributes which God puts forth in his mercies. Then God sees his face in a true glass, which the thankful soul holds up while it praiseth him; whereas an unthankful heart, like a broken glass, disfigures the beautiful face of God, by conceiving such low thoughts as are unworthy of his glorious attributes. Secondly, When they are obedientiall. God accounts those mercies forgotten which are not written with legible characters in our lives. Psa. cvi. 21, 'They forgat God their Saviour.' Upon the Israelites' victory over the city Ai, an altar is built as a monument of that signal mercy; now mark what God commands to be written on the stones thereof. One would have thought the history of that day's work should have been the sculpture, but it is the 'copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel,' Josh. viii. 30, 32; whereby he plainly shewed, that the best way of remembering the mercy was, not to forget to keep the law. Saul could not blind Samuel's eyes,—the people saved the best of the cattle for sacrifice: 'Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams,' 1 Sam. xv. 22. As if he had said, What, Saul! thinkest thou to bribe God with a sacrifice, while thou art disobedient to his command: Dost thou deny him thine own heart to obey his word, and give him a beast's heart in sacrifice for it? Is this the oblation which he hath required, or will accept? Truly God riseth hungry from our thanksgiving-dinners, if obedience be not a dish at the table; without this, we and our sacrifices may burn together. God will pluck such from the horns of the altar and take them off their knees with their hypocritical praises, to pay his debt in another kind. 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land,' Isa. i. 19. Then, and not till then, will God eat of your sacrifices, and yourselves taste of the sweetness of your enjoyments. 'Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness,' Isa. lxiv. 5. Not rejoice without working righteousness, nor that without rejoicing in the work. The threatening, Deut. xxviii., is levelled against Israel, not merely because they served not God, but because they served him not with gladness in the abundance of his mercies. God delights to have his mercy seen in the cheerful countenance of his servants, while they are at his work.

SECTION II.—Thirdly, Then they are real praises when they end in acts of mercy. 'By him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name,' Heb. xiii. 15. Now mark the next words,—'But to do good and communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' As if he had said, Think not that you may thank God, to save yourselves trouble and expense. God's goodness to us should make us merciful to others. It were strange indeed a soul should come out of his tender bosom with a hard, uncharitable heart. Some children do not indeed take after their earthly parents, as Cicero's son, who had nothing of his father but his name; but God's children all partake of their heavenly Father's nature. Philosophy tells us, that there is no reaction from the earth to the heavens; they indeed shed their influences upon the lower world, which quicken and fructify it, but the earth returns none back to make the sun shine the better. David knew that his goodness extended not unto God, but this made him reach it forth to his brethren, Psa. xvi. 3. Indeed, God hath left his poor saints to receive the rents we owe unto him for his mercies. An ingenuous guest, though his friend will take nothing for his entertainment, yet, to show his thankfulness, will give something to his servants. At Christ's return, how doth he salute his saints? Not, 'Come, ye blessed,' ye have kept such a thanksgiving-day; but 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat;—naked, and ye clothed me,' Matt. xxv. 35, 36. Alms are called fruit;—'When I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit,' Rom. xv. 28: implying, that all our profession without these good works are but leaves: this is the solid fruit of our faith,—love to God, and thankfulness for his mercies. Neither must these acts of charity be confined to the money in thy purse, or the bread in thy cupboard, though these are included; there are poor souls as well as poor bodies, that need relief. Hath God plucked thee out of Satan's bondage? Where, then, are thy bowels of compassion toward those who are yet chained to the devil's post? What means dost thou use to redeem these captives out of their slavery? The argument God urgeth

Digitized by Google

on Israel to use strangers kindly, is, to remember they were once so, Deut. xxiii. 7. Hast thou, after long lying in the dungeon of spiritual darkness and troubles of conscience, had thy head lifted up with the comforts of the Spirit, and received into the presence of God, as Pharaoh's butler was to his prince's court? How canst thou think thyself thankful, while thou forgettest others that lie in the same prison, under as sad fears and terrors as once thyself did? 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness; he is gracious and full of compassion,' Psa. cxii. 4. Surely this will hold in this case. Hath God raised thee to an estate? Dost thou now shew the kindness of God to his poor members; as David, who inquired if there were any of the house of Saul. O how unlike are we to the saints of old! They considered the poor, how they might relieve them, yea, they 'devised liberal things;' but we consider and contrive how we may save our purse: they were willing to part with all in an extremity, while we are unwilling to part with a little from our superfluity, laying that, through pride, on our backs, which should cover the poor members of Christ.

SECTION III.—Fourthly, When it produceth a stronger confidence on God. Who will say that man is thankful to his friend for a past kindness, who, nourishes an ill opinion of him for the future? This was all that ungrateful Israel returned to God, for his miraculous broaching the rock to quench their thirst, 'Behold, he smote the rock,—can he give bread also?' Psa. lxxviii. 20. This, indeed, was their trade all the time they were in the wilderness. Wherefore, God gives them their character, not by what they seemed to be while his mercies were before them; then they could say, God was their rock, and the High God their Redeemer; but by their temper and carriage in straits; when the cloth was drawn, and the feast taken out of their sight, what opinion then had they of God? Could they sanctify his name so far as to trust him for their dinner to-morrow who had feasted them yesterday? Truly no, as soon as they feel their hunger return, like froward children, they are crying, as if God meant to starve them. Wherefore, God rejects their praises, and owns not their hypocritical acknowledgments, but sets their ingratitude upon record; they forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel. O how sad is this, that after God hath entertained a soul at his table with choice mercies and deliverances, these should be so ill husbanded, that not a bit of them should be left to give faith a meal, to keep the heart from fainting, when God comes not so fast to deliver as we desire! He is the most thankful man that treasures up the mercies of God in his memory, and can feed his faith with what God hath done for him, so as to walk in the strength thereof in present straits. When Job was on the dunghill, he forgot not God's old kindnesses, but durst trust him, with a knife at his throat,—'Though he kill me, yet will I trust in him.' He that distrusts God after former experience, is like the foolish builder, Matt. vii. 26, he rears his monument for past mercies on the sand, which the next tide of affliction washeth away. Lastly, Thou must not only praise God thyself, but endeavour to transmit the memorial of his goodness to posterity. The Psalmist saith, 'We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,' Psa. lxxviii. 4. Children are their parents' heirs; it were unnatural for a father before he dies to bury up his treasure in the earth, where his children should not find or enjoy it; now the mercies of God are not the least part of his treasure, nor the least of his children's inheritance, being both helps to their faith, matter for their praise, and spurs to their obedience. 'Our fathers have told us what works thou hast done in their days, how thou didst drive out the heathen,' &c., Psa. xliv. 1, 2; from this they ground their confidence, ver. 4, 'Thou art my King, O God; command deliverances for Jacob;' and excite their thankfulness, ver. 8, 'In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.' Indeed, as children are their parents' heirs, so they become in justice liable to pay their parents' debts; now the great debt which the saint at death stands charged with, is that which he owes to God for his mercies, and, therefore, it is but reason he should tie his posterity to the payment thereof. Thus mayest thou be praising God in heaven and earth at the same time.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER LXI.

A REPROOF TO THE UNGRATEFUL WORLD.

We shall conclude this head with a double application. First, How few, alas, can we find so ingenuous as to praise the great Lord of this world's manor, for all the mercies they hold of him! Some are such brutes, that, like swine, their nose is nailed to the trough in which they feed; they have not the use of their understanding so far as to lift up their eye to heaven and say, There dwells that God that provides this for me, that God by whom I live, and from whom I have my livelihood. You would count it a sad spectacle, to behold a man in a lethargy, with his reason so blasted by his disease, that he knows not his friends, and takes no notice of those that bring his daily food. How many such senseless wretches are lying upon God's hands! Divine Providence ministers daily supplies to their necessities, but they take no notice of his care and goodness. Others there are that sacrilegiously set the crown of praise on their own head, which is due alone to God. Thus Nebuchadnezzar writes his own name upon his palace, and leaves God's out: 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' Dan. iv. 30. Proud wretch! was not every stone he used in that pile cut out of God's quarry; and did he not come upon God's ground for every morsel of sand? Thus the atheistical husbandman gives his plough and dung-cart more thanks than the God of heaven, who crowns the year with his goodness. The proud soldier stands upon his sword, daring to take the honour of his victory to himself, and not ascribe it to the Lord of hosts, who at pleasure gives and takes away the heart from the mighty. Yea, some rather than God shall have it, will give it to any other: thus Pope Adrian, in his blasphemous inscription on the gates of a college he built, abuseth God with Scripture language: 'Utrecht planted me, Lovain watered me, and Cæsar gave the increase; which made one write under, *Nihil hic Deus fecit*,—it seems God did nothing for this man. Not that I think it unlawful to acknowledge our benefactors, as instruments in God's hands for our good; but to blot out the name of God, our chief founder, and admit the name of a creature, is a high peace of wickedness. I like that form which a good man used to his friend for kindness,—'I bless God for you, I thank God and you.' He that will exact more requites what we owe him not. Some, instead of returning thanks to God for his mercies, abuse them to his dishonour. It is not more sad than true, that the goodness of God with many serves but to feed their lusts; they eat and drink at God's cost, and then rise up to play: no weapons will serve them to use but the mercies he hath given them. It is very bad if the tenant pays not his easy rent, but to destroy the trees on his landlord's ground is more intolerable; yet such outrages are daily practised with the mercies of God. Michael Balbus is infamous for his horrid ingratitude, who, the same night that the emperor had pardoned and released him, barbarously slew his saviour; and do not many, whom God lets out of the prison of affliction, lift up their traitorous knife at God, wounding his name with their oaths and drunkenness. Others who would be thought thankful, yet all the return they make is but windy praise; they honour him with their lips, and pour contempt upon him in their lives. O, it grates on God's ears when Jacob's voice is attended with Esau's rough hands; When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince had an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could in a moment destroy all his enemies, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may he command us to bless them that curse us, who himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable his patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and insupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of his abused goodness. There is nothing smoother than the sea, yet, when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. There is nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God,

Digitized by Google

and nothing so terrible as his wrath when it takes fire. Be, therefore in the fear of God, stirred up to bethink yourselves what to do. It is the trick, they say of insane persons, to spite their dearest friends most; but what madness is it in thee to fly in the face of God with thy sins, who hath done more for thee than all thy friends, and can do more against thee than all thy enemies! But the more to move thee,—First, Consider that God keeps an exact account of all his mercies. You cannot steal God's custom. He that could tell the prophet where his servant Gehazi had been, and what he had received of Naaman, will one day tell thee, to a farthing, every talent thou hast received of him. God not only keeps an account of thy sins, but of the mercies thou hast received; and thou must be answerable for both. Secondly, Consider how severely he hath dealt with those that never had so much mercy from him as thyself. If heathens are speechless in judgment, when God reckons with them for their mercies, O how confounded wilt thou be, that goest from gospel dispensations, to hold up thy hand at the bar before the judge of all the world! 'They are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful,' Rom. i. 20, 21. If the heathen that was not thankful for his penny, cannot lift up his hand in the day of the Lord, where wilt thou appear, that hast so many hundred talents in thy hand to answer for? But thou askest, how thou art to praise God for his mercies? Thou hast but one way to pay God, and it is a strange one, even by running deeper into his debt. What I mean is, that God who hath given thee life and being, who hath exercised unspeakable patience toward thee in his daily providence, and hath preserved and maintained thee, (although he has been most wretchedly abused by thee, and for it thy life has become forfeited to his justice,) doth yet exhibit a greater mercy, even the Lord Jesus, whom, if thou wilt, with shame and sorrow for thy past sins, come unto, and accept as thy Lord and Saviour, then wilt thou be in a posture to give God praise for his other mercies: he that rejects this, can never be thankful for any. It is Christ alone can give thee a spirit of thankfulness: there is not a Christless person in the world but is unthankful. O what a blessed gospel is this, that teacheth us here to pay debts by running deeper into the score; to be thankful for less mercies, by accepting that which is infinitely greater!

CHAPTER LXII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THANKFULNESS.

Secondly, For exhortation to the saints: not to call you to this duty, for undoubtedly it is your practise: but to quicken you in it, and make you more in love with it. First, Consider it is a duty that becomes you: 'Praise is comely for the upright,' Psa. xxxiii. 1. An unthankful saint carries a contradiction with it. Evil and unthankful are the twins that live and die together: as any one ceaseth to be evil, he begins to be thankful. Secondly, it is that which God expects at your hands; he made you for this end. When the vote past in heaven for your being, yea, happy being in Christ, it was upon this account, that you should be a name and a praise to him on earth in time, and in heaven to eternity. Should God miss this, he would fail of one main part of his design. What prompts him to bestow every mercy, but to afford you matter to compose a song for his praise? 'They are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour,' Isa. lxiii. 8. He looks for fair dealing at your hands. Whom may a father trust with his reputation, if not his child! Where can a prince expect honour, if not among his favourites? Your state is such that the least mercy you have is more than all the world besides. Thou, Christian, and thy few brethren, divide heaven and earth among you. What hath God that he withholds from you? Sun, moon, and stars, are set up to give you light; sea and land have their treasure for your use; others are encroachers upon them, you are the rightful heirs to them; they groan that any others should be served by them. The angels, bad and good, minister unto you; the evil, against their will, are forced, like scullions, when they tempt you, to scour and brighten your graces, and make way for your greater comforts; the good angels are servants to your heavenly Father, and disdain not to carry you in their arms. Your God withholds not himself from you; he is your portion, father,

Digitized by Google

husband, friend, &c. God is his own happiness, and admits you to enjoy him. O, what honour is this, for the subject to drink in his prince's cup! Psa. xxxvi. 8: 'Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.' And all this is not the purchase of your sweat and blood: the feast is paid for by another; only he expects your thanks to the Founder. No sin-offering is imposed under the gospel; thank-offerings are all he looks for. Thirdly, God hath a book of remembrance for your service; he takes kind notice of the little good that is in you, and done by you; not the least office of love to his name and house is overlooked, though mingled with much evil: he commends the one, pardons and pities you for the other; 'There is some good found in him toward the Lord God of Israel,' 1 Kings xiv. 13. What an honourable testimony doth God give of Asa, 2 Chron. xv. 17, that his heart was perfect all his days, though we find he took many wry steps! The little strength that Philadelphia had must not be forgot. What a favourable apology doth Christ make for Joshua, accused by Satan for his filthy garments,—'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' And for his drowsy disciples, 'The flesh is weak, but the spirit is willing!' Now, shall God take notice of the little good in his saints, apologize for their infirmities, commend and reward their weak services, yea, eternize their memory with honour: 'The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,' Psa. cxii. 6. And doth he not deserve to be exalted for his infinite perfections, —praised and loved, who is all good, ever good, and doing good to them? Shall he be tender of thy name, and thou be regardless of his honour, so as to entomb his precious mercies in the sepulchre of unthankfulness? Fourthly, Consider what an ornament a thanful frame of heart is to religion. This commends God to the unbelieving world, who know little more of him than what your lives preach to them; they read religion in that character you print it, and make their report of God and his ways, as they see you behave yourselves in the world. If you walk disconsolately, or murmur at divine Providence, how can they believe that the ways of God are so pleasant as they are said to be? It was a convincing testimony Daniel gave to the goodness of God, when he would praise him thrice a day with the hazard of his life. To see a poor Christian thankful for his little pittance, in the midst of his afflictions, an ordinary understanding would reason thus: Surely this man finds some sweetness in his God, that we percieve not, and is better paid for his service than we are aware of. The joyful praises of dying saints in the midst of fiery flames, have made their spectators go home in love, not only with religion, but martyrdom. Fifthly, Consider the honour that is put upon you in this duty. To attend on a prince, though bare-headed, and on the knee, is counted more honour for a nobleman, than to live in the country, and have the service of his fellow subjects. Though we serve God all the day long, yet in the acts of worship we have the honour immediately to attend on him, and minister to him. Blessed are they who may thus stand about him! Praise is the highest act of worship, and therefore to be continued in heaven's blissful state, as other graces shall be melted into love and joy, so other duties of worship into praise and thanksgiving. The priesthood was a great honour under the law. God chose Aaron and his tribe from among their brethren to serve at his altar: he would take that gift from their hand which he would not at a king's: but in this gospel state every believer hath a more honourable priesthood, because he brings better sacrifices, the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; and while thou art honouring God, thou honourest thyself. Sixthly, Consider, that thy praises will render thy prayers more grateful and successful. Let the river of God's mercies be returned to pay his tribute to him, its source and fountain, that it may refund more abundantly to us again. The saints in their greatest straits, when they have most to beg, deliver their prayers with praise. Jehoshaphat sends his priests praising God into the field, and God fights for him. David in the cave,—'My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.' Daniel, when a trap was laid for his life, praiseth God thrice a day. Christ himself, when he would raise Lazarus, lifts up his eyes and blesseth God,—'I thank thee, O Father,' &c. When he was to suffer, he sings an hymn. A thankful heart cannot easily meet with a denial: 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth and a two-edged sword in their hand,' Psa. cxlix. 6.

Digitized by Google

EPHESIANS vi. 18.

In the Spirit.

We are come to the third branch in the apostle's directory for prayer, the principle or spring from whence it is to flow,—'The Spirit,—praying in the Spirit.'

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IT IS TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT.

WHAT is it to pray in the Spirit? Interpreters comprehend in this phrase, both the spirit of the person praying and the Spirit of God, by which our spirits are fitted for, and actuated in prayer. That is a prayer in the Spirit which, by the help of the Holy Spirit, is performed with our soul and spirit. These go ever together, we cannot exercise our spirit without the Holy Spirit; alas! that is like a lump of clay in our bosoms, till he quickens it; and we cannot but pray, when the Holy Spirit moves upon it. The Spirit's breath is vital. The Holy Ghost doth not breathe in us, as one through a trumpet, which is a mere passive instrument; but stirs and actuates our affections in the duty. Prayer is called a 'pouring out of the soul to God.' The soul is the well, from which the water of prayer is poured; but the Spirit is the spring that feeds, and the hand that helps to pour it forth; the well would have no water without the spring, neither could it deliver itself without one to draw it.

From the words thus explained, arise these two observations. Praying in the spirit is opposed to lip-labour—'They draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is removed far from me.' Parisiensis, glossing upon Hos. xiv. 2, 'So will we render the calves of our lips,' compares the duty of prayer to the calves in the legal sacrifices; 'the composition of the words (saith he) in prayer, is as the skin or hide of the beast, the voice as the hair, the understanding as the flesh, the desires and affections of the heart, as the fat of the inwards; this alone makes it a prayer in God's account.' 'My spirit prayeth,' 1 Cor. xiv. 14; and in ver. 15, 'I will pray with the spirit,—I will sing with the spirit.' 'God whom I serve with my spirit,' Rom. i. 9. The melodious sound which comes from a musical instrument is formed within the belly of the instrument, and the deeper the belly the sweeter the music. The melodiousness of prayer comes from within the man; 'We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit;' and the deeper the groans are that come from thence, the sweeter the melody. There may be outward worship and inward atheism. There may be much pomp in the outward ceremony of the performance, when the person neither loves nor believes that God whom he courts with an external devotion. The blemishes which made the sacrifices in the law rejected, were not in the outward limbs of the beast only, the sick as well as the lame was refused, Mal. i. 8. We read of loud praises, when not a word was heard. But God owns it not as a prayer, that hath the vehemency of the voice, but not inspirited with the affection of the heart. Separate the spirit from the body, and the man is dead; the heart from the lip, and there is a dissolution of prayer. Now we pray in our spirit: When! First, when we pray with knowledge: secondly, in fervency: thirdly, in sincerity. By knowledge, the understanding is set on work; by fervency, the affections; and by sincerity, the will; all these are required before you can pray in the spirit. There may be knowledge without fervency, and this is cold, and quickens not; there may be heat without knowledge, and this is like courage in a blind horse; there may be knowledge and fervency, and this is like a chariot with swift horses, and a skilful driver, but being dishonest, carries it the wrong way. Neither of these, nor both together, avail, because sincerity is wanting. He will have little thanks for his zeal, that is fervent in spirit, but serving himself with it, not the Lord.

CHAPTER II.

SHEWETH, THAT TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT, IT IS REQUIRED THAT WE PRAY WITH UNDERSTANDING; AND WHY; ALSO WHAT UNDERSTANDING.

IN order to pray acceptably, it is necessary that we pray with understanding. A blind sacrifice was rejected in the law, Mal. i. 8; how much more blind devotions under the gospel! As knowledge aggravates a sin, so ignorance takes

Digitized by Google

from the excellency of an action that is good. 'I bear them witness,' saith Paul, 'they have a zeal, but not according to knowledge.' 'Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews,' John iv. 22. Where we see that the want of knowledge in acts of worship is such a fundamental defect, that it brings damnation with it. But why is knowledge so necessary to acceptable praying?

SECTION I.—First, Because without this, it is not a reasonable service, for we know not what we do. God calls for your reasonable service, Rom. xii. 1, which some oppose to the legal sacrifices which they offered up: in the gospel we are to offer ourselves. The soul and spirit of a man is the man. Why did not God lay a law on beasts to worship him, but because they have not a rational soul to understand and reflect upon their own actions? And will God accept that worship from man, wherein he doth not exercise that faculty which distinguisheth him from a beast? 'Shew yourselves men,' Isa. xlvi. 8. And truly he that worships the true God ignorantly, is brutish in his knowledge, as well as he that prays to a false god. Secondly, Because the understanding is the leading faculty of the soul; the inward worship of the heart is the chief work; and the other powers of the soul are disabled if they want this guide. As for those violent passions of sorrow and joy, which sometimes appear in ignorant worshippers, they are spurious. Christ's sheep, like Jacob's, conceive by the eye. The saint's eye is enlightened to see the majesty and glorious holiness of God, and then it mourns before him in the sense of his own vileness. 'Now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' Job xlii. 5, 7. Again, by an eye of faith he beholds the goodness and love of God to poor sinners in Christ, and in particular to himself, and this sight affects his heart to love and rely on him, which it is impossible the ignorant soul should do.

SECTION II.—But you say, What is necessary for the praying soul to know? First, That he to whom he directs his prayer is the true God. Religious worship is an incommunicable flower in the crown of the Deity, and that both inward and outward. We are religiously to worship him only, who, by reason of his infinite perfections, deserves our supreme love. He must have the crown, that owns the kingdom; 'the kingdom and power' are God's, therefore the glory of religious worship belongs to him alone, Matt. vi. 13. Angels are the highest order of creatures, but we are forbid to worship any of the host of heaven: Deut. xvii. 3, 'Who would not fear thee, O king of nations? For to thee it doth appertain.' Where fear is put for religious worship, as appears by the place. The want of this knowledge filled the heathen world with idolatry, for when they found any virtue or excellency in the creature, they adored and worshipped it. Secondly, There is required a knowledge of this true God, what his nature is. 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. xi. 6. A perfect knowledge of the Divine perfection is not to be gained by a finite being. He was right who said, none indeed knows God thus, but God himself; yet a scripture knowledge of him is necessary to the right performance of this duty. The want of understanding his omniscience and infinite mercy, is the cause of vain babbling, and a conceit to prevail by long prayers, which our Saviour charges upon the heathen, and prevents in his disciples by acquainting them with these attributes, Matt. vi. 7, 8. They came rather to revere God, than to beg. The ignorance of this glorious Majesty is the cause why many are so irreverently familiar with God in their expressions. We are bid to 'be sober, watching unto prayer!' Truly, there is an insobriety in our very language, when we do not clothe the desires of our hearts with such humble expressions, as may signify the awe and dread of his sacred Majesty. In a word, the reason why men dare come reeking out of the adulterous embraces of their lusts, and stretch forth their unwashed hands to heaven in prayer, is because they know not God to be of such infinite purity as will have no fellowship with the workers of iniquity: 'Thou thoughest I was altogether such a one as thyself,' Psa. l. 21. Thirdly, We must understand the matter of our prayers, without which we cannot in faith say Amen to our own prayers, but may ask that which neither becomes us to desire, nor is honourable for God to give. This Christ rebuked, when she in the gospel put up her ambitious request for her

Digitized by Google

children, to be set, one at the right, and the other at the left hand of Christ in his kingdom. God never gave us leave thus to indite our own prayers, by the dictate of our private spirit, but hath bound us up to ask only what he hath promised to give. Fourthly, A knowledge of the manner how we are to pray, in whose name, and what qualifications are required in the prayer and person praying. We find Paul begging prayers,—'That ye strive together with me in your prayers;' in another place he tells us of a lawful striving, 2 Tim. ii. 5. There is a law of prayer, which must be observed: even in false worship they go by some rule in their addresses to their gods; therefore those Samaritans, 2 Kings xvii. 26, when a plague was on them, concluded the reason to be, because they knew not the manner of the god of the land. The true God will be served in due order.

SECTION III.—How few, then, pray in the Spirit? Were this the only character to try many by, would they not be exposed as mere babblers? As, first, those in the Popish Church, where most know not a word that they say in prayer. If it be a weakness to subscribe a petition to a king, which we never read nor understood, what shall we think of such brutish prayers as these, sent to heaven? Yea, amongst ourselves, many, who, though they pray in their mother-language, are ignorant as to the matter of their prayers, how else could they mutter over the creed and commandments with their blind devotion, instead of prayers? Are there more deplorable ruins of mankind to be found among the Indians? Yea, when they join with their minister in prayer, neither know that God to whom the prayer is directed, nor the Mediator under the favour of whose name it is presented. Before Nebuchadnezzar could bless God, he had the understanding of a man given him. Do you not think such ignorant wretches as these might be easily persuaded to kneel before an image, or to put their letter into some angel or saint's hand for despatch, being made to believe that it will find a kinder welcome by the mediation of such favourites? O, what a darkness is there even at this day upon the face of our waters! on which, had but the pope's instruments opportunity to sit brooding awhile, they might soon bring their desired work to perfection among the multitude. We see there is need not only to stir up our people to pray, but also to teach them how they may pray. It teaches to all that are the mouth of God for others in prayer, so to pray, that those who join with them may clearly understand what they put up to God for them. Who is more to be blamed, he that prayeth in an unknown tongue, or he that useth such uncouth phrases, and high-flown expressions, as are not understood by half the assembly? Suppose thine own spirit prays, yet thy understanding is unfruitful unto them: they are at a loss and stand gazing, as the disciples did, when the cloud parted Christ from them. Either come down from thy high, towering expressions, or help them up to thee. They may say of thee as those of Moses, 'We know not what has become of the man.' No wonder, if while they cannot keep sight of the matter in hand, their thoughts rove about some object of their own framing. Dost thou pray to be admired for thy rolling tongue, height of gifts, &c.? Consider what low and base end thou propoundest in so high a service. What, no net to fish with for applause but a sacred ordinance? The whip which Christ made in the gospel belongs to thy back, when he was all on fire with zeal to see his house of prayer made a house of merchandise. O, how his soul loathes the baseness of thy mercenary spirit who dost the same, though in another dress.

CHAPTER III.

FERVENCY NECESSARY IN ORDER TO PRAY IN THE SPIRIT.

THE second thing required in praying with our spirit is fervency. The soul keeps the body warm while it is in it. So much as there is of our soul and spirit in a duty, so much is there of heat and fervency. If the prayer be cold, we may certainly conclude that the heart is idle, and bears no part in the duty. Our spirit is an active creature; what it doth is with a force, whether bad or good. Hence, in Scripture, the poor labouring man is said to set his heart on his wages, Deut. xxiv. 15; the hopes of what he shall have at night make him sweat at his work in the day. Darius 'set his heart on Daniel to deliver him;' and

Digitized by Google

he 'laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him,' Dan. vi. 14. When the spirit of a man is set about a work, he will do it to purpose: 'If thou shalt seek the Lord with all thy heart and with all thy soul,' Deut. iv. 29; that is, fervently. This consists not in a violent agitation of the bodily spirits; a man may put his body into a heat in duty, and the prayer be cold; that is fervent prayer that flows from a warm heart and enkindled affections; like an exhalation which is first set on fire in the cloud, and then breaks forth into thunder: 'My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end,' Psa. xxxix. 3, 4. Now as zeal is not one single affection, but the vehemency of all, so fervency in prayer is when all the affections act strongly and suitably to the several parts of prayer. In confession, when the soul melts into a holy shame and sorrow for the sins he spreads before the Lord, he feels a holy smart and pain within, and doth not act a tragical part with a comical heart; Chrysostom saith, 'To paint tears is worse than to paint the face.' Here is true fervency,—'I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise,' Psa. lv. 2. There may be fire in the pan when there is none in the piece; a loud wind, but no rain with it. David made a noise with his voice and mourned in his spirit. So in petition, the soul is drawn out with strong desires of the grace it prays for, with breakings of heart, sometimes set out by the violence of thirst, which is more tormenting than that of hunger. As the hunted hart panteth after the cool waters, so did David's soul after God. Psa. xlii. 1. Fervency in prayer is sometimes represented by the strainings of a wrestler,—Jacob is said to wrestle with the angel; and of those that run in a race: Acts xxvi. 7, 'Instantly serving God day and night,'—they exerted themselves: 'My soul breaketh for longing,' Psa. cxix. 20; as one that with straining breaks a vein.

But why must we thus pray in the spirit fervently? First, From the command,—'Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy strength, with all thy might, and his word shall be in thy heart;' which imports the affectionate performance of every duty. Sever the outward from the inward part of God's worship, and he owns it not, 'Who hath required this at your hand?' saith God, Isa. i. 12; as if he had said, Did I ever command you to give a beast's heart in sacrifice, and keep back your own? Why dost thou pray at all? Wilt thou say, Because God commands it? Then, why not fervently, which the command chiefly intends? When you send for a book, would you be pleased with him that brings only the cover? And will God accept the skin for the sacrifice? The external part of the duty is but as the cup; thy love, faith, and joy, are the wine he desires to taste; without these, thou givest him but an empty cup: and what is this but to mock him? Secondly, To comport with the name of God. The common description of prayer is calling on the name of God. Now, as in prayer we call upon the name of God, so it must be with a worship suitable to his name, else we pollute it: this is the chief meaning of the third commandment. In the first, God provides, that none besides himself be worshipped; in the second, that he, the true God, be not served with will-worship, but his own institutions; and in the third, that he be not served vainly and negligently. There is no attribute in God but calls for this fervency in his worship.

First, He is a great and glorious God; as such it becomes us to approach his presence with our affections in their best array. Are yawning prayers fit for a great God's hearing? Darest thou speak to such a Majesty before thou art well awake, and hast such a sacrifice prepared as he will accept? 'Cursed be the deceiver that hath in his flock a male, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.' See here, anything less than the best we have, is a corrupt thing: he will accept a little, if it be the best; but he abhors that thou shouldst save the best for another. He that offers not the strength of his affections, is a deceiver, because he robs him of his due, and he is a great God. When Jacob intended a present to the governor of the land, he bids his children take of the best of the fruit of the land in their vessels. The awful thoughts which God extorts from the very heathen by his mighty works, reproach us, who live in the bosom of the church, and do injustice to his holy name, by our spiritless manner of serving him. Secondly, He is the living God. Is a dead-hearted prayer a sacrifice suitable to a living God? How can that be accepted

Digitized by Google

of him, which never came from him? Lay not your dead prayers by his side; the lively prayer is his, the dead thine own. 'The living, the living, they shall praise him.' The glorious angels, who, for their zeal, are called seraphim, and a flame of fire, these he chooseth to minister to him in heaven; and the saints, who sojourn on earth, have their extraction from heaven, and have spirits raised and refined from the dulness of their earthly constitution, he sets apart for himself as priests, to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto him. The quicker any one is himself, the more offensive is a slow workman to him. How, then, can God, who is all life, brook thy lazy devotions? When he commanded the neck of an ass to be broken, and not offered up unto him, was it because he was angry with the beast? No; it was his own workmanship: but to teach us, how unpleasing a dull heart is to him in his service. Thirdly, He is a loving God, and love will be paid in no coin but its own. Give God love for love, or he accounts that you do not give him anything. 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' John xiv. 15. And 'If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be contemned,' Cant. viii. 7. So, if a man think to give God anything in prayer, instead of his love and fervent affection, it will be contemned, because it doth not correspond with the affections which God expresseth toward us: he draws out his heart with his purse, and gives himself with all his gifts to his people, therefore, he expects our hearts should come with all our services to him. It is no wonder to see the servant whose master is hard and cruel, have no heart to do his work; but love in the master puts life into the servant; and, therefore, God, who is incomparably the best master, disdains to be served as none but the worst among men are accustomed to be.

CHAPTER IV.

CONTAINS A THIRD REASON OF THE POINT.

THIRDLY, The promise is only made to fervent prayer. A still-born child is no heir, neither is a prayer that wants life heir to any promise. Fervency is to prayer, what fire was to the spices in the censer; without this it cannot ascend as incense before God. Some have attempted a shorter way to the Indies by the north, but were ever frozen up in their way; and so will all sluggish prayers be served. It were an easy voyage, indeed, to heaven, if such prayers might find the way thither; but never could he shew any of that good land's gold who prayed thus, though he were a saint. The righteous man, indeed, is declared heir, as to all other promises, so to this of having his prayer heard; but he is not in a fit posture to enter into the possession of this promise, or claim present benefit from it, while his heart remains cold in the duty. There is a qualification to the act of prayer as necessary as of the person praying,—'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' When God intends a mercy for his people, he stirs up a spirit of prayer in them,—'I never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain!' that is, I never stirred them up to, and helped them in it, and then let them lose their labour. 'Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you: and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart,' Jer. xxix. 12, 13. Feeble desires, like weak pangs, go over, and bring not a mercy to the birth. As the full time grows nearer, so the spirit of prayer grows stronger. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?—I tell you that he will avenge them speedily,' Luke xviii. 7. None in the house, perhaps, will stir for a little knock at the door, they think he is some idle beggar; but if he raps thick and loud, then they go, yea, out of their beds. Luke xi. 8, 'Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise.'

First, This shews, there is little true praying to be found among us, because there are few that pray fervently. Let us sort men into their several ranks: First, The ignorant; do these pray fervently? Their hearts must needs be frozen up in the duty; they dwell too far from the sun, to have any of this Divine heat in their devotions. Secondly, The profane person that is debauched with his filthy lusts, his heat runs out another way. Can the heart which is inflamed with lusts be other than cold in prayer? Hell-fire must be quenched before this from heaven can be kindled. Thirdly, The soul under the power of roving

Digitized by Google

thoughts, while his eyes seem fixed on heaven; can he be fervent? Can the affections be true, and the mind inattentive? Fervency unites the soul, and gathers in the thoughts to the work in hand; it will not suffer diversions, but answers all foreign thoughts, as Nehemiah did them that would have called him off from building. 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease?' Nehem. vi. 3. It is said of Elias, he prayed earnestly; 'he prayed in praying,' so the Greek; as in Ezekiel's vision, there was a wheel in a wheel, so a prayer in his prayer: whereas the roving soul is prayerless; his lips pray, and his mind plays; his eye is to heaven, as if that were his mark, but he shoots his thoughts down to the earth. Fourthly, He to whom the duty is tedious and wearisome, who doth not sigh and groan in the duty, but under it, who prays as a sick man works, finding no delight in it. True fervency suffers no weariness, feels no pain. Affections are strong things, able to pull up a weak body. Therefore, he that shrugs at a duty, and turns, as a sick man, from one side of his bed to the other for ease, shews he hath little pleasure in the duty, and therefore less zeal. These aches of the spirit in prayer, though he be a saint, declare him to be under a great distemper. A man in health finds not more savour in his food, and refreshment from it, than the Christian doth in the offices of religion, when his heart is in the right temper.

CHAPTER V.

SOME ARGUMENTS TO ENKINDLE OUR ZEAL IN PRAYER.

First, For exhortation. Dost thou pray? Pray fervently, or thou dost nothing. That prayer which warms not thine own heart, will it, thinkest thou, move God's? A man hath not the use of his hand when it is benumbed with cold, neither canst thou have the use of thy spirit in duty, till thy heart has some sense and feeling of what thou prayest for.

Section I.—Consider the excellency of zeal and fervency. If a saint, thou hast a principle that inclines thee to approve of things that are excellent; and such is this. Life is the excellency of beings; yea, even in inanimate creatures there is an analogical life, and therein consists their excellency. The spirits of wine commend it: in the diamond, the sparkle gives the worth; in fountain-water, that which makes it most excellent is its motion, called therefore living water: much more in beings that have true life; for this, the flea or fly are counted nobler creatures than the sun. The higher kind of life that beings have, their nature is thereby the more advanced,—beasts above plants, men above beasts, and angels above men. Now, as life gives the excellency to being, so vivacity and vigour in operating gives excellency to life. Indeed, the nobler the life of the creature is, the greater energy is there in its actings; the apprehension of an angel is quicker, and zeal stronger, than of a man. So that the more lively thou art in duty, and the more zeal thou expressest therein, the nearer thou comest to their nature, who for their zeal in the service of God, are called a 'flame of fire.' To be calm and cool in inferior things, is better than zeal. Prov. xvii. 27: 'A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit:' in the Hebrew it is 'a cool spirit:' injuries do not put him into a flame, neither does any occurrence heat him to any height of joy, grief, or anger. Who more temperate in these than Moses? But set this holy man to pray, he is all life and zeal. Indeed, it is one excellency of this fervency of spirit in prayer, that it allays all sinful passions. David's fervency in praying for his child when alive, made him bear the tidings of his death so patiently. We hear not an angry word that Hannah replies to her scolding companion Peninnah, and why, but because she had found the art of easing her troubled spirit in prayer? What need she contend with her adversary, who could be wrestling with God to espouse her quarrel? And were there nothing else to commend fervency of spirit in prayer, this is enough, that, like David's harp, can charm the evil spirit of our passions, which in their excess, the saint counts great sins, and finds them grievous troubles. When are you more serene, than when your souls can mount with fervour in the flame of your sacrifices into the bosom of God? Possibly you may come, like Moses, down the mount with greater heat, but it will be against sin.

Digitized by Google

SECTION II.—God deserves the prime and strength of thy soul should be bestowed on him in thy prayers. First, he gave thee the powers of thy soul, and all thy affections. Such thou art, as thou wert in the idea of the Divine mind. Now, may not thy Maker call for that which was his gift? He that made the inanimate being, and confined the narrow soul of brutes to act upon some low, sensitive good, ennobleth thee with a rational appetite and spiritual affections. Now, wilt thou not employ those divine powers in the worship of thy God, from whom thou hadst them? It were hard that God should be denied what himself gave. 'I came to my own,' saith Christ, 'and they would not receive me:' thus here, I came to my own creature, he had his life from me, and brings a dead heart unto me. Suppose a friend should give you notice that he will ere long be at your house, and send you in before-hand a vessel of rich wine, would you be unwilling to broach it for his entertainment? Expectest thou a better friend to be thy guest than God? The psalmist calls upon us to 'serve the Lord with gladness,' and what is his enforcement? 'Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us,' Psa. c. 2, 3. Who plants a vineyard, and expects not to drink of the wine? If God calls our corn and wine his, he therefore expects to be served with them? much more with our love and joy, for surely he allows us not to alienate the best of his gifts from him. When thou art therefore going to pray, call up thy affections which haply are asleep on some creature's lap, as Jonah in the sides of the ship,—'Awake, sleeper, and call upon thy God.' Secondly, he deserves thy affections, because he gives thee his; he is jealous of, because he is zealous for thee. Well may he complain of thy cold prayers whose heart is on a flame of love to thee. High and admirable are the expressions with which he sets forth his love to his people; whatever he doth for them is with zeal. In protecting of them, as 'birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem;' that is, swiftly: as a bird flies to her nest, when she perceives her young in danger: in avenging them of their enemies, 'the zeal of the Lord shall perform it:' in hearing their prayers, he doth it with delight; in forgiving their sins, he is ready to forgive, multiplies to pardon: when they ask one talent, he gives them two. Jacob desires a safe egress and ingress: God doth this, and more, for he brings him home with two bands. He gives not the least mercy, but he draws forth his soul and heart with it: even in his afflicting providences, where he seems to shew least love, there his heart overflows with it: 'What shall I do unto thee, O Ephraim? My bowels are turned within me.' Thirdly, He is a good paymaster for his people's zeal: 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. xi. 6. Never did fervent prayer find cold welcome with him. Elijah's prayer fetched fire from heaven, because it carried fire to heaven. The tribe of Levi for their zeal were preferred to the priesthood,—and why? Surely they who were so zealous in doing justice on their brethren, would be no less zealous in making atonement for them by their sacrifices. Most men lose the fervency and strength of their desires by misplacing them: they are zealous for such things as cannot, and persons that often will not, pay them for their pains. O how hot is the covetous man in his chase after the world's pelf! He pants after the dust of the earth, and that upon the heads of the poor; but what reward hath he for his labour? After all his getting, like the dogs in pursuit of the hare, he misseth his game, and at last goes poor and supperless to bed in his grave: he dies a fool, Jer. xvii. 11. How many court spaniels (that have fawned and flattered for some scraps of preferment) have at last been rewarded with the fatal stroke of the headsman, or a consumptive death in their prince's favour! which made that ambitious cardinal say too late, if he had been as observant of his heavenly Master as he had been of his earthly, he should not have been left so miserable at last. In a word, do we not see the superstitious person knocking his breast, and cutting his own flesh, out of a zeal to his wooden god, that hath neither ear to hear, nor hand to help him? Now, doth not the living God, thy loving Father, deserve thy zeal more than their dead and dumb idols do theirs? For shame, let us not be cold in his worship, when the idolator sweats before his god of wood; let not the worldling's zeal in pursuit of his earthly mammon, leave thee behind in serving thy God.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

SOMETHING BY WAY OF HELP, TO RAISE OUR AFFECTIONS IN PRAYER.

But how may we get this fervency of spirit in prayer? If thou hast it not, Christian, another question must precede this, How thou, who art at present in a state of spiritual death, mayest have life? There must be life in the soul, before there can be life in the duty. All the rugs in the upholsterer's shop will not fetch a dead man to warmth, nor any arguments, though taken from the most moving topics in the Scripture, will make thee pray fervently, while thy soul lies in a dead state. Christ must first give thee life, and having life, there is hope of bringing thee into some heat. But if thou art a saint, it calls for thy utmost care; and when thou hast it, keep it. As a bird cannot rise, nor stay in the air long, without some labour and motion with its wings, the saints have a spark of heavenly fire in their bosom, but this needs their care and diligence to keep it alive. Deadness in the heart of a saint will damp his zeal, if not cleared by daily watchfulness. Observe, therefore, what is thy chief impediment to fervency in prayer, and set thyself vigorously against it: if thou art remiss in this, thou wilt be much more so in prayer itself. He that knows of a slough in the way, and mends it not before he takes his journey, hath no cause to wonder when his chariot is laid fast in it. Certainly were not the firmanent of the saint's soul cooled with some malignant vapours, that arise from within his own breast, and weaken the force of divine grace in him, it would be summer all the year long with him; his heart would be ever warm, and his affections lively in duty. Look, therefore, narrowly whence thy cooling comes; perhaps thy heart is too much let out upon the world in the day, and at night thy sprits are spent, when thou shouldst be in prayer. If thou wilt be hotter in duty, thou must be colder towards the world. Wood that hath the sap in it will not easily burn; neither will thy heart readily take fire in holy duties when it is full of the world: drain therefore thy heart of these carnal affections, if thou meanest to be warm and lively in this duty. Now there is no better way for this, than to set thy soul under the frequent meditation of Christ's love to thee, thy relation to him, with the great and glorious things thou expectest from him; but if you let your heart continue soaking in the thoughts of an inordinate love to the world, you will find when you come to pray, that your hearts will be in duty as a wet log at the back of a fire, long in kindling, and soon out again. Perhaps the deadness of thy heart in prayer, ariseth from not having a deep sense of thy wants, and the mercies thou art in need of. Couldst thou but pray feelingly, thou wouldst pray fervently. The hungry man needs no help to teach him how to beg. Is it pardon of sin thou wouldst pray for? First apply such considerations to thy soul, as may make thee feel its smart; then go and sleep at prayer if thou canst. David expressing the anguish of his soul for his sin, Psa. xxxviii. 4, 'Mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me;' now when his heart is sick with these thoughts, he pours out his soul in prayer to God,—'All my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee,' ver. 9. Art thou to pray for others? First, pierce thy heart through with their sorrows, and by a spirit of sympathy bring thyself to feel their miseries; then will thy heart be warm in prayer for them. Thus we read, Christ troubled himself for Lazarus, before he lifted up his eyes to heaven for him, John xi. 33, 38. It may be thy want of zeal proceeds from a defect in thy faith; faith is the back of steel to the bow of prayer; this sends the arrow with force to heaven; where faith is weak, the cry will not be strong. He that goes about a business with little hope of succeeding, will do it but faintly; the less we hope the less we endeavour. We read of strong cries that Christ put up in the days of his flesh; mark what enforced his prayer,—'unto him that was able to save him;' not only so, but if you look into that prayer, you shall find he called upon God as his God,—'My God, My God;' his hold on God held up his spirit in prayer. So in several of the saints upon record, you may see how the spirit of prayer ebbed and flowed as their faith was up and down. This made David press so hard upon God in his distress; 'I believed, therefore have I spoken; I was greatly afflicted,' Psa. cxvi. 10. This made the woman of Cannan so irresistibly importunate: let Christ frown and chide,

Digitized by Google

deny and rebuke, she yet makes her approaches nearer and nearer, gathering arguments from his very denials; and Christ tells us what kept up her spirit undaunted, 'O woman, great is thy faith!' May be it proceeds from some distaste thou hast given to the Holy Spirit, who alone can blow up thy affections: then no wonder thou art cold in prayer, when he is gone that should keep thy heart warm. What is the body without the soul, but cold clay, dead earth? And the soul without the spirit is no better. O, invite him back, or thy praying is at an end; and if thou wouldst persuade him to return, remove what drove him away.

CHAPTER VII.

SINCERITY REQUIRED TO PRAY WITH OUR SPIRIT.

THE third thing required to praying with our spirit, is sincerity. There may be much fervour where there is little or no sincerity; and this is strange fire, not the natural heat of the new creature, which both comes from and acts for God, whereas the other is from, and ends in self. Indeed, the fire which self kindles, serves only to warm the man's own hands that makes it: 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks,' Isaiah l. 11. The prophet represents them as sitting down about the fire they had made. Self-acting, and self-aiming ever go together; therefore our Saviour with spirit requires truth; 'the Father seeketh such to worship him,' as will 'worship him in spirit and in truth,' John iv. 23, 24.

But wherein consists this sincere fervency? Zeal warms the affections, sincerity directs their end, and shews their purity and incorruption. The affections are often strong when the heart is insincere: therefore the apostle exhorts, that we 'love one another with a pure heart fervently,' 1 Peter i. 22; and speaks in another place of sorrowing after a godly sort, that is, sincerely. Now the sincerity of the heart in prayer appears, when a person prays from pure principles to pure ends. First, When he is real in what he presents to God in prayer, the index of his tongue without, and the working of his heart within, go together; doth not declaim against a sin with his lips, which he favours with his heart; he doth not make a loud cry for that grace, which he would be sorry to have granted him. This is the true badge of a hypocrite, who often would be loth God should take him at his word; a dismal day it will be to such, when God shall bring in their own conscience to witness against them, that their hearts never sealed the requests they made. There is a policy sometimes used by princes, to send ambassadors, and set treaties on foot when no peace is intended; such a deceit is to be found in the false heart of man, to blind and cover secret purposes of war and rebellion against God, with fair overtures in prayer to him for peace. Secondly, When the person is not only sincere in what he desires, but this from a pure principle to a pure end. I doubt not that a hypocrite in confession may have a real trouble upon his spirit for his sins, and passionately desire pardoning mercy, but not from a pure principle; a hatred of sin, but an abhorrence of wrath he sees hastening to him for it; not for a pure end, that the glory of God's mercy may be magnified in and by him, but that himself may not be tormented by God's just wrath. He may desire the graces of his Spirit, but not out of any love to them, but only as an expedient, without which he knows that to hell he must go; as a sick man in great pain calls for some potion he loathes, because he knows he cannot have ease except he drinks it; whereas the sincere soul desires grace, not only as physic, but food; he craves it not only as necessary, but as sweet to his palate; the intrinsical excellency of holiness inflames him with love to it: as one, taken with the beauty of a virgin, saith he will marry her, though he hath nothing with her but the clothes on her back; so the sincere heart would have holiness, though it brought no other advantages with it, than what is found in its own lovely nature. Now, he that would pray acceptably, must pray thus in his spirit, that is, with the sincerity of his spirit; the prayer of the upright is his delight.' Nadab and Abihu were destroyed by fire, because they 'offered strange fire before the Lord,' Lev. x. 1; and such is all zeal, that is not taken from the altar of a sincere heart. 'The fervent prayer' can do much, but it must be 'of a righteous man,' and such the sincere man only is. And no wonder that God

Digitized by Google

stands so much upon sincerity in prayer, seeing the lip of truth is so prized even among men; nature hath taught men to commend their words to others, by laying their hands on their breasts, as an assurance, that what they say is true, which the penitent Publican it is likely aimed at, Luke xviii. 13, he 'smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!' thereby declaring whence his sorrowful confession came. That light which told the heathens that God must be worshipped, informed them also, this worship must come from the inward recesses of the heart. What care the gods for gold? let us offer that which is more worth than all treasures, the heart and inward affections of it. Benzo, in his *Historia Novi Orbis*, relates a strange custom of the natives there,—*Indi occidentales dum sacra faciunt, dimisso in guttur bacillo, vomtiumcient, ut, Idolo ostendant, nihil se in pectore mali occultum gerere*:—When worshipping their gods, they used, by putting a little stick down their throats, to provoke themselves to vomit, thereby shewing their idol, that they carried no secret evil within them. I should not have named this barbarous custom, but to shew how deeply this notion is engraven in the natural conscience, that we must be sincere in the worship of God. Let it put us upon trial, whether we thus pray in the spirit, and whether we can find sincerity stamped on our fervency; if the prayer be not fervent, it cannot be sincere: approve thyself here, and thou mayest, without presumption, reckon thyself a saint; but how fervent soever thou art, without sincerity, it matters not, for zeal without uprightness is of no service; nay, no one will go to hell with more shame than the false-hearted zealot, who mounts up toward heaven in his fiery chariot,—a seeming zeal, but at last is found a devil in Samuel's mantle, and so is thrown down like lightning from heaven whither he would have been thought to be going. Be not loth to be searched; there will need then no farther search to prove thee unsound; if God's officer be denied entrance, all is not right within.

CHAPTER VIII.

RULES FOR TRIAL OF THE SINCERITY OF OUR HEARTS IN PRAYER.

SECTION I.—First, What is thy care in performing this duty in secret? If thy heart be sincere, it will delight in privacy. A false heart calls others to witness his zeal for God. May be he is forward to put himself upon duty where he hath spectators to applaud him; but either he is wholly a stranger to secret prayer, or else he is cold in the performance; he finds himself becalmed, and now he wants the breath of others to fill his sails. Whereas a sincere Christian never finds more freedom of spirit, than in his ordinary addresses to God. Joseph, when he would give full vent to his passion, sought some secret place to weep, therefore he retired into his chamber, Gen. xliii. 30; so the sincere Christian goes to his closet, easeth his heart into the bosom of God, and lets his passions of sorrow for sin, and love to Christ, have their full scope, which in public prayer he restrains. Now speak, Christian, what is thy temper? Can thy closet witness for thee in this particular? It is the trick of a hypocrite to strain himself to the utmost in duty, when he hath spectators, and to be careless alone.

Secondly, Observe thyself in thy more public addresses to the throne of grace, in two particulars: first, when thou prayest before others, observe on what thou bestowest thy chief care and zeal, whether on the externals or internals of prayer; that which is exposed to the eye and ear of men, or that for the eye and ear of God; the devout posture of thy body, or the inward devotion of thy soul; the pomp of thy words, or the power of thy faith; the agitation of thy bodily spirits in the vehemency of thy voice, or the fervency of thy spirit in heart-breaking affections. These inward workings are the very soul of prayer. It is faith, love, brokenness of heart for sin, and the inward affections exerted in prayer, that, like Elijah in his fiery chariot, mount up to God in the heavens, while the others, with the prophet's mantle, fall to the ground. The sincere soul dares not be rude in his outward posture; he is careful of his words, that they be grave and pertinent, neither would he pray them asleep who join with him, by a cold manner of delivering his prayer: but still it is the inward disposition of his heart he principally looks to, knowing well, that it is possible to be warm in the duty, thereby benefiting others, and

Digitized by Google

at the same time have his own heart cold and idle; therefore he doth not count he prays well, except he finds his own affections drawn out in the duty. Whereas the hypocrite, if he come off the duty with the applause of others in the external performance, is well pleased. Secondly, When thou joinest with another that prayeth. Do the gifts and graces that breathe from others in prayer, warm thy affections, and draw out thy soul to bear them company to heaven in the petitions they put up? Or do they stir up a secret envying and repining at the gifts of God bestowed on them? This discovers much pride and unsoundness in thy spirit. The hypocrite is proud, and thinks all the water lost that runs beside his own mill: whereas the sincere soul prizeth the gifts of others, heartily blesseth God for them, and maketh a humble and holy use of them; his heart is as much affected with the holy, savoury requests that another puts up, as when they come out of his own mouth; but the hypocrite's eye is evil, because God is good.

SECTION II.—Thirdly, Observe if thy fervency in prayer be uniform. A false heart may seem very hot in praying against one sin, but can skip over another, as a partial witness, that would fain save the prisoner's life, will not speak all he knows: a hypocrite will be favourable to one lust, and violent against another; whereas a sincere Christian abhors all sin; 'Order my steps in thy word; and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' Psa. cxix. 133. The hypocrite is as uneven in his petitions as in his deprecations, earnest for some mercies, and commonly of an inferior nature, but more indifferent in his desires for those that are greater; he tithes mint and cummin in his prayers, but neglects the weightier things of the promise, the sanctifying graces of the Spirit,—humility, heavenly mindedness, content, self-denial; a little of these will satisfy him. Fourthly, Observe whether thy endeavours correspond with thy prayers. The hypocrite seems hot in prayer, but you will find him cold enough at work; he prays very fiercely against his sins, as if he desired them to be all slain upon the place; but doth he set himself upon the work of mortification? Doth he withdraw the fuel that feeds them? When temptations come, do they find them in arms, resolved to resist their motion? No; if a few good words in prayer will do, well and good; but as for any more, he is too lazy. Whereas the sincere Christian is not idle after prayer; when it hath given heaven the alarm and called God to his help, then he takes the field himself, and opposeth his lusts with all his might, watching their motions, and taking every advantage he possibly can to fall upon them; every mercy he receives, he beats it out into a weapon to knock down all thoughts of sinning again. 'Seeing that thou our God has punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?' Ezra ix. 13, 14. God forbid! saith the holy soul: every promise he reads, he lift it up as a sword for his defence against his enemy; 'having these promises,—let us cleanse ourselves,' 2 Cor. vii. 1. I shall close this with a few directions.

SECTION III.—First, See that thy heart is united by faith to Christ. It is faith that purifies the heart from its false principles and ends in duty. 'God made man upright,' and while he stood so, his eye and foot went right; but after Eve had talked with the serpent, she, and all mankind after her, learnt the serpent's crooked motion, to look one way, and go another; 'God made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,' Eccles. vii. 29. Beg, therefore, with David, that God would 'renew a right spirit within thee,' Psa. li. 10. What the evil spirit hath perverted, the Holy Spirit alone can set right. Hypocrisy in duty comes from the falseness of man's depraved nature; the heart, therefore, must be made new before it can be sincere. The new heart is the single heart; Ezek. xi. 19, 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you.' Secondly, Make hypocrisy in prayer appear as odious to thee as possible, and thou need dress it up in no other than its own clothes. First, Consider what a grievous sin it is. A lie spoken by one man to another, is a sin of high aggravation; what then is that lie which is uttered in prayer to God! Surely, this must be much more horrid, for here is blasphemy in the untruth. God spares not to give the hypocrite the lie,—'Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit,' Hos. xi. 12; the lies they told God were as numerous as their prayers. O, the patience of God, that doth not strike the hypocrite dead, while the lie is in his throat, as he did

Digitized by Google

Ananias and Sapphira. Secondly, It is a great folly. Who but a fool can think to blind the eyes of the Almighty? Canst thou cover the sun with thy hand, that it shall not shine? As unable art thou to hide thy secret designs, so that the great God should not see them. It is impossible to deceive God; but thou deceivest thyself most wofully: thou thinkest that thou mendest the matter by praying, but thou makest it worse. When thou comest on thy trial for thy life, as Solomon saith of another kind of hypocrite, Prov. i. 18, lay wait for thine own blood, and lurk privily for thy own life. Of all sinners, the hypocrite hath the precedency in God's purposes and preparations of wrath; hell is prepared for him as the first-born of damnation, Matt. xxiv. 51. Other sinners are said to have their portion with hypocrites, as the younger brethren with their elder, who is the heir. Thirdly, Crucify thy affections to the world. Hypocrisy in religion springs from the bitter root of some carnal affection unmortified. So long as the prey lies below, thy eye will be to the earth, when thou seemest, like an eagle, to mount in thy prayers to heaven. God is in the hypocrite's mouth, but the world is in his heart, which he expects to gain through his good reputation. I have read of one that offered his prince a great sum of money, to have leave once or twice a-day to come into his presence, and only say, *God save your Majesty.*' The prince, wondering at this large offer for so small a favour, asked him, What advantage would this afford him? O sire, saith he, this, though I have nothing else at your hands, will get me a name in the country for one who is a great favourite at court, and such an opinion will help me to more at the year's end than it costs me for the purchase. Thus some, by the name they get for great saints, advance their worldly interests, which lie at the bottom of all their profession. Well, as thou lovest thy soul, and wouldst not lose this for ever, mortify those carnal affections, which thou findest most likely to withdraw thy heart from God. Thou knowest not God, if thou seest not enough in him to make thee happy without the world's contribution; this thoroughly believed will make thee sincere in his service. 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect,' Gen. xvii. 1.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ACCEPTABLE PRAYER IS THAT WHICH IS IN THE SPIRIT.

HAVING dispatched the first importance of this phrase, 'Praying in the spirit,' namely, the spirit of the person that prayeth, we proceed to the second. To pray in the Spirit is to pray in or with the Spirit of God; 'Praying in the Holy Ghost,' Jude 20. In order to pray aright, it is necessary that we pray in or by the Spirit of God. Prayer is the creature's act, but the Spirit's gift. There is a concurrence both of the Spirit and the soul of the Christian to the performance of it. The Holy Spirit is said to pray in us, Rom. viii. 26, and we are said to pray in him, Jude 20. By the first, is meant his inspiration, whereby he excites and assists the creature to and in the work; by the latter, the concurrence of the saint's faculties. The Spirit doth not so pray in the Christian, as that he doth not exercise his own faculties in the duty. In handling this, I shall observe three things.

SECTION I.—I shall assert the truth of the point, that to pray aright, it is necessary we pray by the Spirit of God: Ephes. ii. 18, 'Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father;' mark those words, 'by one Spirit.' As there is but one Mediator to appear and pray for us in heaven, so but one Spirit that can pray in us, and we by it, on earth. We may as well venture to come to the Father through another Mediator, as pray by another Spirit than by the Holy Ghost. Therefore, our Saviour, when he would show his dislike of his disciples' rash motion, he doth it by telling them, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' Luke ix. 55: as if he had said, It behoves you to be well acquainted with the Spirit's influences in prayer; if your prayers be not breathed in and out by my Holy Spirit, they are abominable to me and my Father also. The name of Christ is not more necessary than the Spirit of Christ in prayer; Christ's name fits only the Spirit's mouth, it is too great a word for any to speak as he ought, that hath not the Spirit to help him: 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,' 1 Cor. xii. 3. A man may say the words, without any special work of the Spirit, and so may a

Digitized by Google

parrot: but to say Christ is Lord believingly, with thoughts and afflictions comparting with the greatness and sweetness thereof, requires the Spirit of God to be in his heart. Now it is not the bare naming of Christ in prayer, and saying, For the Lord's sake, that procures our welcome with God; but saying it in faith; and none can do this without the Spirit. Christ is the door that opens unto God's presence, and lets the soul into his bosom, and faith is the key that unlocks the door; but the Spirit is he that makes this key, and helps the Christian to turn it in prayer. In the law it was a sin, not only to offer strange incense, but also to bring strange fire, Lev. x. 1: by the incense, which was a composition of sweet spices, apointed by God to be burnt as a sweet perfume in his nostrils, was signified the merit and satisfaction of Christ, who being bruised by his Father's wrath, offered up himself a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. The fire that was put to it (which was also appointed to be taken from the altar) signified the Spirit of God by which we are to offer up all our prayers and praises, even as Christ offered himself up by the eternal Spirit. To plead Christ's merits in prayer, and not by the Spirit, is to bring right incense, but strange fire, and so our prayers are but smoke, offensive to his pure eyes, and not incense, a sweet savour to his nostrils.

SECTION II.—What is it to pray by the Spirit of God? We must know, there are two ways the Spirit of God helps persons in prayer. First, The Spirit of God helps in prayer by his gifts; now those gifts with which he furnisheth a person for prayer, are either extraordinary or ordinary. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in prayer were in the primitive times shed forth, whereby the apostles and others were able in a miraculous manner to pray, as well as preach, on a sudden, in a language that they had never learnt. 'I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also,' 1 Cor. xiv. 15; that is (as interpreters understand it,) he will make use of this extraordinary gift Christ had furnished him with, so as he might edify the church by it. This extraordinary gift was fitted for the infancy of the gospel church, and ceased with it. The ordinary gift of the Spirit in prayer is that special faculty whereby persons are enabled, on a sudden, to form the conceptions of their minds and desires of their hearts into apt words before the Lord in prayer; this is a common gift, and bestowed very often on those that are none of the best of men; the hypocrite may have more of this gift than some sincere Christian. It is a gift that commonly bears proportion to natural endowments, a ready apprehension, fruitful fancy, voluble tongue, and audacity of spirit, which are all gifts of the Spirit. Now we see that the head may be ripe, and the heart rotten; and, on the contrary, the heart sound and sincere, where the head is defective. Secondly, The Spirit helps in prayer by his grace. His gifts help to the outward expression, but his grace to the inward affection. By the gifts of the Spirit a person is enabled to take the ear and affect the heart of those that hear him; but by the grace of the Spirit influencing a soul in prayer, he is enabled to move his own heart, and the heart of God also: and this is the man that indeed prays in the Spirit; the other hath the gift, but this is the spirit of prayer.

Now there is a twofold grace necessary to pray thus. First, There is necessary to this praying in the Spirit, grace to sanctify the person. Before the creature is renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, it can neither apprehend nor desire things aright; 'The carnal mind perceives not the things of God, nay, it is enmity against God:' and how is such a person fit to pray acceptably? First, then, the Spirit renews the creature, by infusing those supernatural qualities, or habits of his saving, sanctifying graces, which make him a new creature; by these he comes to dwell and live in him, and then he exerciseth his own graces thus infused. The soul is in the body before it actuates and moves it; we read of living in the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit, Gal. v. 25; walking supposeth life. To pray or perform any holy action in a holy manner, is to walk in the Spirit; but we must live in the Spirit, or the Spirit live in us (which is all one) before we can thus walk in the Spirit. There are some acts the Spirit of God puts forth upon souls, that are not thus sanctified; acts of common illumination, restraining grace, and assisting also; thus many hypocrites are enabled to pray in excellent expressions, but he never did assist an hypocrite, or any unsanctified person, to perform the inward part of prayer, to mourn sincerely for sin, to pant after Christ and his grace, or to cry, Abba, Father,' believingly; these are vital

Digitized by Google

acts of the new creature, and flow from a spirit of grace infused into the soul, from which follows this spirit of supplication, Zech. xii. 10. Secondly, As habitual grace is required to sanctify the person, so actual grace to assist him as often as he prays. The Spirit of God may dwell in a soul by his habitual grace, yet deny actual assistance in a particular duty; and then the poor Christian is becalmed, as a ship at sea when no wind is stirring: for as grace cannot evidence itself, neither can it act itself. Hence it is, that sometimes the saint's prayer speeds no better, because he is not influenced by the Spirit in it. Samson, when his hair was cut, was weak like another man. The Spirit of God is a free agent; 'Uphold me with thy free Spirit,' Psa. li. 12. As a prince, when he pleaseth he comes forth and shows himself to the soul, and when he pleaseth retireth. What more free than the wind? Not the greatest king on earth can command it to rise at his pleasure; to this the Spirit of God is compared, John iii. 8: he is not only free to breath where he lists, in this soul, and not in that, but when he pleaseth also.

CHAPTER X.

THE ASSISTANCE THE HOLY GHOST GIVES A SAINT IN PRAYER.

But the question will here be, What assistance doth the Spirit of God give a saint in prayer, more than another? The assistance which the Spirit of God gives a saint in prayer above another, lies deep; it is laid out upon the inward man, and the inward part of the duty. So that a person may come to know whether himself prays in the Spirit, but he cannot judge so easily of another. Now this special assistance consists in three particulars. First, The Spirit puts forth an act of resuscitation upon the soul, to stir up its affections. Never was any formal prayer of the Holy Spirit's making; when he comes, it is a time of life; the Christian's affections spring in his bosom at his voice, as the babe in Elizabeth at the salutation of Mary; or as the strings under the musician's hands stir and speak harmoniously, so also the saint's affections at the secret touch of the Spirit. He excites the saint's fear, filling him with such a sense of God's greatness, his own nothingness and baseness, as makes him reverence the Divine Majesty he speaks unto, and deliver every petition with a holy trembling upon his spirit. Such a fear was upon Abraham's spirit, when in his prayer for Sodom he expressed how great an adventure he made, being but dust and ashes, to take upon him to speak unto the Lord. He excites the Christian's mourning affections; by his divine breath he raiseth the clouds of the saint's past sins, and when he hath overspread his soul in meditation with the sad remembrance of them, then in prayer he melts the cloud, and dissolves his heart into soft showers of evangelical mourning, that the Christian sighs and groans, weeps and mourns, like a child that is beaten, when he sees the rod laid out of his heavenly Father's hands, and fears no wrath from him for them. The apostle tells us, the groans and sighs which the Spirit helps the saint to, are such as 'cannot be uttered,' Rom. viii. 26; no, not by the saint himself: being unable to translate the inward grief he conceives into words, he is fain sometimes to send it with this inarticulate voice to heaven, yet it is a voice well understood there, and very musical in God's ear. In a word, he stirs up affections suitable to every part of prayer, enabling the gracious soul to confess sin with an aching heart; to supplicate mercy and grace, with an inward feeling of his wants; and to praise God with a heart enlarged and carried on high upon the wings of love and joy. A hypocrite may display his art in the phrase and composition of his words, still it is but counterfeit prayer, for want of that which should give life and energy to it. This the Spirit of God alone can effect. Secondly, As the Spirit of God excites the Christian's affections in prayer, so he regulates and directs them. Who, indeed, but the Spirit of God can guide and rule these fiery steeds? He is said, in this respect, to help our infirmities, for we know not what to pray for as we ought, Rom. viii. 26. We are prone to over-bend the bow in some petitions, and want strength to bend it enough in others: one while we overshoot the mark, praying absolutely for that which we should ask conditionally; another time we shoot beside the mark, either by praying for what God hath not promised, or too selfishly for that which is promised. Now, the Spirit helps the Christian's infirmity in

Digitized by Google

this respect, for 'he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God,' ver. 27; that is, he so holds the reins of their affections, that they keep their due order. He by his secret whispers instructs them, when to let out their affections full speed, and when to take them up again. Just as the spirit was in the living creatures to direct their motion, of whom it is said, 'They went every one straightforward; whither the spirit was to go, they went, and they turned not when they went,' Ezek. i. 12; so the Spirit, influencing his saints in prayer, keeps them that they go neither on this hand nor on that, but straightforward, and draw their request by his rule. Thirdly, He fills the Christian with a holy confidence and humble boldness in prayer. Sin makes the face of God dreadful to the sinner: guilty Adam shuns his presence,—I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid. If the patriarchs, conscious how barbarously they had used their brother, were terrified at his presence, and so abashed that they could not answer him; how much more confounded must the sinner be, to draw near to the great God, when he remembers the horrid sins he hath perpetrated against him! Now the Spirit easeth the Christian's heart of this fear, assuring him that God's heart meditates no revenge upon him, but freely forgives him; yea, which is more, that he takes him for his dear child, and that the Christian may not stand in doubt thereof, he seals it with a kiss of love upon his heart, leaving there the impression of God's fatherly love, whereby the Christian comes to have amiable thoughts of God, is able to call God Father, and expect the kind welcome of a child at his hands. This is the 'Spirit of adoption,' which the apostle speaks of, Rom. viii. 16, that chaseth away all servile fear and dread from the soul,—'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.' And, Gal. iv. 6, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.'

CHAPTER XI.

A REPROOF TO THOSE THAT MAKE A MOCK OF HAVING THE SPIRIT.

SECTION I.—TAKE heed of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, as to this work of his in his saints. Some are so desperately profane that they insult those who shew any strictness in their lives, or zeal in the worship of God, especially in this duty of prayer, with this,—These are they that have, and pray by, the Spirit; nay, more, some have called their praying by the Spirit, praying by the devil. Every gracious soul hath the Spirit of God dwelling in him; Rom. viii. 9: 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.' That God hath promised his Spirit to help his saints in prayer, is undeniable, and that he accepts none but what is put up by his Spirit, is as sure. Now, dost thou not know, bold wretch, what spirit thou art actuated by, who makest a mock of having the spirit, and praying by the Spirit? Who but a devil would set thee on work to blaspheme the Spirit of God? But why should we wonder that the work of the Holy Spirit in the saints should be thus scorned and blasphemed, seeing we find that the Spirit of God, working so mightily in Christ himself, was maliciously interpreted by the wicked Pharisees to be from the devil, Matt. xii. 24. But let such know to their terror, this will be found to come near the blasphemy of the Spirit, which is unpardonable; ver. 32; 'Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come;' and this our Saviour speaks, upon their attributing what he did by the Spirit of God to the spirit of the devil.

SECTION II.—Try whether you have the Spirit of God, or no. A prayerless state is a sad state to live in. Now, thou canst not pray acceptably, except thou prayest in the Spirit, and thou canst not pray in the Spirit, except thou hast the Spirit in thee.

But how may I know whether I have the Spirit of God, or no? First, I shall answer negatively. Not because thou hast now and then some good motions from the Holy Spirit stirred in thee; the evil spirit is found often stirring evil motions in souls where he doth not dwell; a great stir he makes often in the bosom of a saint, yet he dwells not there, because 'he finds no rest in these dry places;' therefore he is represented as saying, 'I will return unto my house,' namely, to those that are yet in a carnal state, where he can command as

Digitized by Google

master. Truly, thus the Holy Spirit is often moving in the consciences and affections of carnal creatures, counselling, rebuking, and exciting them; so that, upon his suggestions, some warm affections are raised in them to that which is good, but presently all is quashed and comes to nothing, and the Spirit driven away by the entertainment he finds. Again, you cannot know by the common gifts of the Spirit,—illumination, conviction, restraining grace, and assistance to perform the external part of religious duties; these are gifts of the Spirit, but such as do not prove he hath the Spirit that hath them: these gifts are beamed from the Spirit of God, and shew that the kingdom of God is come nigh such an one; but they do not demonstrate that God is come into that soul, and hath taken possession of it for his temple; they are like the presents which a suitor sends to a person whom he is wooing to be his wife, but the match breaking off, all are required again. Many have these gift sent them by the Spirit of God, with whom the match between Christ and them was never made up; and if they be not called for back in this life, they shall be accountable for them at the great day.

SECTION III.—Secondly, Affirmatively; by what thou mayest conclude that thou hast the Spirit of God, and that in two particulars. First, If thou art regenerated by the Spirit. The Spirit of God dwells only in a new creature. So long as a man continues in his natural state, he is 'sensual having not the Spirit,' Jude 19: this text refers to such as have no more than a reasonable soul, without a higher principle of life than nature gives to all men. St. Paul useth the word to set out a man in his natural state, as opposed to another that hath a principle of supernatural life from the Spirit of God; 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit,' 1 Cor. ii. 14. But here the question will be, How shall I know I am regenerated? To this I shall answer. Every regenerate soul hath a Divine nature and disposition; 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,' John iii. 6; namely, is spiritual. He hath a soul raised as far above natural men, as they are above the nature of a beast. When Nebuchadnezzar had the understanding of a man given him, he grazed no longer among the beasts of the field, but returned to his princely throne and life. Thus the regenerate soul returns to that high and heavenly disposition which man in his primitive, holy state had: now God, and the things of God, take up his thoughts; he hath a new eye to see vanity, where before he placed felicity; a new taste, which makes him spit out those sinful pleasures as poison, that once were his pleasant morsels; and he counts all earthly enjoyments but filth and dross in comparison of Christ and his grace; 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.' Find, therefore, what thy appetite is, and thou mayest know what thy life is, whether spiritual or natural. Secondly, If thou art led by the Spirit. The Spirit is the saint's guide: 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God, Rom. viii. 14. As the soul is in the body to direct and move it, so the Spirit is in their soul:—'Thou hast holden me by my right hand; thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,' Psa. lxxiii. 23, 24. To be led by the Spirit of God, imports, first, a sense of our own weakness and ignorance. He that thinks he knows his way, or is able to direct his own steps, will not accept of a guide; it is the weak child, or the blind man, that calls to be led. Saul was struck blind, and then he was led by the hand into Damascus, Acts ix. 8. Inquire, therefore, whether God hath made thee sensible of thy own ignorance and impotency. Man by nature is proud and self-conceited; he leans much to his own understanding, and stands upon his own strength, and is very loth to be thought out of the way, or unable to go of himself in it: 'A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil; but the fool rageth, and is confident,' Prov. xiv. 16. Tell a soul spiritually wise he is out of the way, he fears himself, hearkens to the counsel, and turns back; but a fool falls out with him that counsels or reproves him, and is confident he is right, as if the way to heaven was as easy as the way to market. The first thing that the Spirit doth, is to dismount the soul from this high opinion he hath of himself. 'Men and brethren,' say those converts, when God had, with one prick in their hearts, let out this wind of pride, 'what shall we do?' Acts ii. 37. Their spirit now comes down, they are willing to be directed, and are so meek and humble, that a child may lead them. He that is led by another, is ruled by

Digitized by Google

him which way he should go. Inquire, therefore, whether the Spirit of God doth thus determine thy soul in its actings and motions. Now, you know which is the Spirit's walk, he is the Spirit of truth, and leads into truth: the word of God is the road he keeps: if thou walkest not by this rule, he is not thy guide. Speak, therefore, what authority bears the word with thee? Dost thou consult and hearken to it, or art thou afraid to advise with it? If the word will not stop thee from thy sinful courses, thou art not led by the Spirit of God. Again, to be led, imports willingness. The carnal heart may be driven by the rebukes of the Spirit; but the gracious soul follows the Spirit, as a child his father that holds him by the hand, yea, that cries after his father, to take him along with him. 'Where the Spirit is, there is liberty.' The Spirit indeed draws, but the soul runs after him. Mary chose the better part: it was not imposed on her against her liking. The obedience of the saints is compared to a sacrifice: 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice,' &c., Rom. xii. 2; and it is no acceptable sacrifice that is not offered willingly. The Spirit of God makes the soul willing in the day of his power. 'I will go with this man,' saith Rebekah; she was as willing to have Isaac as he was to have her. The gracious soul answers the Spirit's call, as the echo does the voice,—Seek my face;—Thy face will I seek.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THOSE THAT WANT THE SPIRIT OF GRACE.

Now this calls for a double exhortation: first, those that, upon examination, find they are destitute of the Spirit; secondly, to those that, by the rules of trial, find the Spirit of God is in them.

SECTION I.—To thee who art yet without the Spirit of God. Better it were thou hadst not the spirit of a man than to want the Spirit of God. If the Holy Spirit be not in thee, assure thyself the evil one is; and there is no way for thee to turn this troublesome guest out of doors, but by having the Spirit of God in. Thou mayest know where thy eternal mansion will be, in heaven or hell, by the spirit that fills and acts on thy soul here. If God takes not up thy soul as a mansion for his Spirit on earth, it shews that he prepares no mansion for thy soul in heaven, but leaves thee to be entertained by him in the other world who is thy guest in this. Thus thou seest how thy soul hangs over the infernal pit. What course canst thou take to prevent thy endless misery that is coming upon thee? Wilt thou stand up, like Haman, to make request for the life of thy soul? Alas! thou canst not pray, though thy life lies on it; thou wantest the Spirit of God, who would help thee to groans and sighs. Prayer, you see, is not a work of nature, but a gift of grace; not attained by human skill and art, but taught and inspired by the Holy Ghost. At the bar of man the orator's tongue may smooth over a cause so as to carry it: Isa. iii. 3, he is called, 'the eloquent orator;' or, as in the Hebrew, *he that is skilful in a charm.* Thus Abigail so charmed David's passion with an eloquent speech, that he returned his sword into its scabbard, which was drawn to cut off her husband and his family. But words, alas! make no music in God's ear; they avail no more with him when his Holy Spirit is not in them, than Esau's prayers and tears did with Isaac for the blessing. The same rod which wrought miracles in Moses' hand would have done no such thing in the hand of another, because not influenced by the spirit that Moses had. The same words put up in prayer by a man's own spirit are weak and ineffectual, yea, distasteful and abominable, which, delivered by the Spirit of God in another, are mighty with God, and acceptable to him. Kings have their cooks, and eat not anything but what is dressed by their hands. The great God will not like that sacrifice which his Spirit doth not prepare and offer. Those prayers which are applauded by men, are sometimes a great abomination to the Lord, who sees the heart to be void of his grace: on the contrary, those prayers which are despised and censured by man may be highly pleasing to God. Eli was offended with Hannah, and took her for a drunken woman; but God knew her better, that she was not drunk with wine, but filled with the Spirit in prayer, therefore graciously answered her request. It was wisely done of one, who being sent ambassador to a foreign prince, studied the language of the country, that he might the more

Digitized by Google

effectually persuade the king, by delivering his embassy in his own tongue. O seek thou the Spirit of God! that thou mayest pray to God in the language of heaven, and there is no doubt but thou shalt succeed.

SECTION II.—First, Labour to be deeply sensible of thy deplorable state while without the Spirit: an unsavoury creature thou art, unable for any duty, incapable of any comfort. The Spirit is often in Scripture compared to water, rain, and dew; now, as the earth is barren, and can bring forth no fruit without these, so is the heart of man without the Spirit of God. O get thy soul affected with this! When the fields are burnt up for want of rain, man and beast make a moan, yea, the very earth itself, cleft with drought, by opening its thirsty mouth, expresseth its extreme need of some kind showers from the heavens to refresh it. And hast thou no sense of thy woful condition? Which is worse, think you, that the fruits and beasts of the field should perish for want of water, or thy soul for want of the Spirit? Couldst thou but be brought to lament thy want, there were hope of having it supplied; Isa. xliv. 3: 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed.' Secondly, When thou art inwardly scorched with the sense of thy graceless condition, earnestly beg this gift of God; now thou goest in a good time, and mayest hope to speed. Possibly thou hast heretofore prayed for the Spirit, but so indifferently, that thou hast grieved him while thou hast been praying for him; but now thou seest thy need, and thyself undone except thou have him, therefore I hope thou wilt not be a cold suitor, which, if thou art not, thou art sure to have him. Christ assures thee as much, Luke xi. 13, 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' A father may deny his wanton child bread to play with, but not his starving child, that cries for it to preserve his life. God can, and will, deny him that asks the Spirit with a view to pride himself with his gifts; but not the hungry soul, that humbly, yet vehemently cries, Lord, give me thy Spirit: nay, let me tell thee, thy strong cries and earnest prayers for the Spirit would be a sweet evidence to thee that thou hast him already within thee. Thirdly, Plant thyself under the word preached; this is the Spirit's chariot in which he rides, called therefore the 'ministration of the Spirit.' The serpent, that evil spirit, got into Eve's heart by her ear, and the Holy Spirit ordinarily enters at the same door: he is received 'by the hearing of faith,' Gal. iii. 2. They that leave off hearing the word, to meet with the Spirit, do as if a man should turn his back on the sun that it may shine on his face. The poor do not stay at home for the rich to bring their alms to their house, but go to their door and there wait for relief. It becomes thee, poor creature, to wait at the posts of wisdom, and not expect that the Spirit should run after thee. If the master come to the truant scholar's house, it is to whip him to school. Fourthly, Take heed of resisting the Spirit when he makes his approaches to thee in the word; sometimes he knocks, and meeting a repulse goes from the sinner's door. He that hath promised to come in if we open, hath not promised to come again, if we unkindly send him away. He doth, indeed, often return after repulses, but sometimes, to shew his liberty, he doth not; nay, leaves a padlock, as I may say, on the door, a judiciary hardness and unbelief, which no minister's key can open. Thus Christ dealt with those who so politely excused themselves to his messengers that invited them,—'None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke xiv. 24. Doth the Spirit move on thy heart in an ordinance? Beware how thou behavest thyself toward him. Quarrel not with the preacher as if he had a spite against thee, and came for a spy to find out the nakedness of thy soul. Struggle not with thy convictions, smother not the motions of the Holy One, but rather cherish them. It is no little mercy, that as the Spirit went by in his chariot, he would call at thy door, and give thee so merciful a warning, which may end in thy conversion here, and salvation hereafter. It heightened the favour which God bestowed on the widow of Sarepta, that there were many other widows in Israel at the same time, but the prophet was sent to her, and not to them; so it enhanceth this mercy vouchsafed to thee, that there should be many other sinners in the congregation, and yet the Spirit not sent to them, but to thee, with a secret message from heaven, to rouse thy sleepy conscience, and woo thy affections from sin to Christ. Be friendly to

Digitized by Google

these motions, and thou shalt have more of his company. Fifthly, Converse with the saints that have the Spirit of God in them. They that would learn a foreign language, associate with men of the country whose natural tongue it is. Wouldst thou have God, and learn to speak heaven's language? associate with those who, by reason of their heavenly nature, will be speaking of the things of God. It is true, they cannot propagate their spiritual nature; but it is as true, that the Spirit of God may make the gracious discourses which they breathe forth, the means of quickening thee; while thou art with such, thou walkest in the Spirit's company. Joseph and Mary sought Christ among his kindred, supposing it most likely to find him among them. And it is more probable to find the Spirit of Christ among the saints, his spiritual kindred, than among strangers. The Spirit of God came upon Saul when among the prophets; at the hearing of them prophesy and praise God, his spirit was moved also to do the same. Who knows but thy heart may be warmed at their fire, and from the savour of their graces, be drawn thyself to the love of holiness? Above all, take heed of profane company; this is a great quencher to the Spirit's work. When David resolves for a godly life, he sends the wicked from him,—'Depart from me, ye evil-doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God,' Psa. cxix. 115. If there be any work of the Spirit of grace in thee, as thou wouldst not be deprived of him, choose not men of a profane spirit for thy associates; they are like the north-wind that blows away the rain. When the Spirit of God hath been moving on a soul, the clouds begin to gather in his bosom, and there are some hopes of a shower of repentance;—then come wicked company, and drive all these clouds away, till there be no sign of them left.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS NOT TO GRIEVE THE SPIRIT.

To the saints: I beseech you not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit in your bosoms. Thou canst not agree to live long without prayer, if a saint; nor art thou able to pray to purpose without him: when he withdraws, such a chillness will invade thy soul, that thou wilt have little power to pray, for it is his divine breath that enkindles thy affections. If there be no warmth in the heart, there can be no fervency in prayer; and without the Spirit of God, no kindly heat can be in the soul. O, take heed, therefore, thou dost not grieve him, lest he refuse to assist thee! Three ways the Spirit of God may be grieved by a saint, so as to cause him to deny his assistance in prayer. First, By some sin secretly harboured in the heart; 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,' Psa. lxvi. 18. Now, when God refuseth to hear, we may be sure the Spirit refuseth to assist; for God never rejects a prayer which his Spirit indites. Sin is so offensive to the Holy Spirit, that wherever it is bid welcome he will shew distaste. If you would have this pure Dove stay with you, be sure you keep his lodging clean. Hast thou defiled thyself with any known sin? Think not to have him help thee in prayer, till he hath helped thee to repent; he will carry thee to the laver before he goes with thee to the altar. If thou wouldst have the Spirit of God breathe in thy soul at prayer, present it not to him besmeared with any sin unrepented of. Secondly, By frequent resisting or putting off his motions. As the Spirit helps in prayer, so he is the saint's monitor,—'He shall bring all things to your remembrance,' John xiv. 26. God called Jacob up to Bethel; so the Spirit prompts the saint to duty:—Such a mercy thou hast received,—up, Christian, praise thy God for it while it is fresh in thy memory, and warm in thy heart; such a temptation lies before thee, go and pray, that thou mayest not be led into it. Now is a fit time for thy withdrawing thyself to hold communion with, and pay thy homage to, God. Now, when the Christian shall shift off these motions, and from time to time neglect the Spirit's counsel, he is exceedingly grieved; and leaves the soul for a time, till the sad consequences bring the Christian to see his folly, and prepare him to entertain his motions more kindly. Thus Christ leaves the spouse in her bed, when she would not rise at his knock, and makes her run after him many a weary step before he will be seen of her. Christ thrice calls up his drowsy disciples to watch and pray, that they might not enter into temptation, but finds them still asleep when he comes; what saith he then? Truly, he bids them

Digitized by Google

'sleep on;' take your rest, and see what will come of it. Indeed, they soon saw it to their sorrow, for they all presently fell into that very temptation which their Master had so seasonably warned them against, and this awoke them to purpose. Thirdly, By priding ourselves in and with the assistance he gives. Pride is a sin that God resists; indeed it is a sin that strives with God himself. It is time for the Spirit to be gone, when his house is let over his head; he takes it as warning when the soul lifts up itself into his seat; if he may not have the honour of the work, he will have no hand in it. The proud man makes the Spirit an underling to himself, he useth his gifts to set up himself with them. Three ways pride discovers itself in prayer, which must be resisted if we mean to have the Spirit's company. First, when the creature ascribes the Spirit's work to himself, and sets his own name upon the duty; instead of blessing God for assisting, he applauds himself, and hath a high opinion of his own abilities, pleasing himself with what expressions and enlargements of affection he had in the duty. This is a sin which every gracious soul must tremble at. 'I live,' saith Paul, 'yet not I,' Gal. ii. 20. 'I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,' 1 Cor. xv. 10. Thus shouldst thou say, I prayed, yet not I; I wrestled, yet not I, but the Spirit of God which was with me. Applaud not thyself, but humbly admire the grace of God in helping such a poor creature as thou art; 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chron. xxix. 14. Secondly, when we go to duty in confidence of the gifts and grace we have already received, and do not acknowledge our dependence on the Spirit, by casting ourselves upon him for present assistance. It is not asking once for all will serve the turn; thou mayest have his help in the morning, and want it at night, if thou dost not again humbly ask for his aid. You know how Samson was served, when he thought to go out as he used to do: alas! the Spirit was gone, and had carried away his strength with him. God will have thee know, the key to thy heart hangs at his girdle, and not at thy own, so that thou canst not open and enlarge it at thy pleasure. Acknowledge God, and his Spirit shall help thee; but lean to thy own understanding, and thou art sure to fall. If pride be at the beginning of the duty, shame will be at the end of it. Thirdly, when we rely on our prayers, and not entirely on Christ's mediation, for acceptance; this is pride with a witness, and highly derogatory to the honour of Christ. God, indeed, accepts the saints in prayer, but not for their prayer, but for Christ's sake. Now the Spirit will not give his assistance to rob Christ of his glory; when he helps thee to pray, he calls thee out of thyself, to rely wholly on the mediation of Christ. Wrong Christ, and you grieve his Spirit.

EPHESIANS vi. 18.

And watching thereunto.

These words present us with the fifth branch in the apostle's direction for prayer, which I called prayer's guard. Prayer to the saints is as the great artillery to an army, of great use to defend them, and of as great force to do execution upon their enemies; therefore it needs the stronger guard to be set about it, lest it be taken from, or turned against them by the enemy.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUTY OF WATCHING, AND WHY IT MUST ATTEND OUR PRAYERS.

Section I.—Now, the guard which the Spirit of God here appoints, is watching, —'watching thereunto.' Watching is either proper, or improper; literal, or metaphorical. Watching, literally taken, is an affection of the body: *that* only can properly be said to watch, which is subject to sleep; and so the body is, not the soul. Thus to watch, in a religious sense, is a voluntary denial of sleep to our bodies, that we may spend either the whole, or part, of the night in pious exercises. Thus the Jews kept the night of the passover holy, Exod. xiii. 42. Our Saviour often spent the night in prayer, Matt. xxvi. 38. We find Paul

Digitized by Google

treading in his steps, 2 Cor. vi. 5, 'In watchings and fastings.' Many a sweet spiritual entertainment holy David's devout soul got in the night, when others lay asleep in their bed: 'My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, —when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches,' Psalm lxiii. 5, 6. No doubt, for a devout soul, upon some extraordidary occasions, thus to watch unto prayer, is not only laudable, but delectable. Happy soul, that can thus steal in the dark into the arms of his beloved, and watch for devotion, while others watch to do mischief. This is the Christian, whose soul, like Gideon's fleece, shall be filled with the influences of heaven above others. Watching is taken metaphorically, for the vigilancy of the soul; this is principally meant here, and in other Scriptures where we are commanded to watch, Mark xiii. 35; Rev. xvi. 15; 1 Thess. v. 6; 1 Peter v. 8. Now, we shall the better understand what duty is imposed upon the Christian under this word, if we consider what bodily watching is; two things it imports,—'waking' and 'working;' when a man wakes in the night to attend some business to be done, such an one truly watcheth; a man that has no sleep in the night, but not through any business that he hath to despatch, he may be said to wake, but not to watch. The shepherds are said to keep watch over their flocks in the night, Luke ii. 8; and the disciples watched with Christ, while they sat up to wait on him the night before his passion, Matt. xxvi. 40. So that for a Christian to watch in a spiritual sense, is to preserve his soul awake from sin in the night of this world, that he may keep the Lord's charge, and do the duty imposed upon him as a Christian. Now prayer being one principal duty he is to attend, and that with all his might, therefore watching is very often joined with it, Matt. xxvi. 41; Mark xiii. 33; Luke xxi. 36; Col. iv. 2; 1 Peter iv. 7. In handling this duty, I shall, First, shew, why the Christian is to watch unto prayer: Secondly, and wherein the duty consists: Thirdly, I shall set the Christian's watch for him, by giving some little counsel towards his constant performing of it. First, Why must the Christian watch in prayer?

SECTION II.—First, Because of the importance of the duty of prayer; no one action doth a Christian meet with in his whole life, of greater weight and moment. First, in regard of God. Prayer is an act of religious worship in which we have immediately to do with the great God, to whom we approach in prayer. It is too sacred a duty to be performed between sleeping and waking, with a heavy eye or a drowsy heart; this God complained of—'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee,' Isaiah lxiv. 7. He counts it no prayer where the heart is not stirred up and awake. There is no duty in which we can honour and dishonour God more, than in prayer: O, how then ought we to watch in this duty! Again, in regard of ourselves; for our behaviour in prayer hath an universal influence upon all the passages of our whole life; as a man is in this duty, so he is likely to be in all the rest; if he is careless in praying, then he is negligent in hearing, loose in his walking; he shall find that he miscarries in all his enterprises, is ensnared in all his enjoyments, baffled with every temptation, and discomposed at every affliction that meets him: and the reason of this is, because our strength, both to do and suffer, comes from God. God communicates his assistance to his children in a way of communion with them; they ask, and have; they seek, and find: knock, and mercy is opened to them. Prayer is the channel, in which the stream of divine grace, blessing, and comfort, runs from God into their hearts; dam up the channel, and the stream is stopped. Secondly, Watchfulness is of as great importance to prayer, as prayer is to all our other duties: no duty can be despatched well without prayer, nor prayer without watching; for it is not prayer, but prayer performed in a holy, spiritual manner, that is effectual; now this cannot be done when the Christian is off his watch. Take the Christian napping, with his graces in a slumber, and he is no fitter to pray, than a sleepy man is to work; whatever a man is doing, sleep, when it comes, puts an end to it; the strong man is as unable to defend himself in his sleep, as the child; the rich man and the poor are alike, he enjoys his estate no more than if he had none. Thus the Christian, while his graces are asleep, is like another that hath no graces (as to the present use of them); he will pray as the carnal man doth, and enjoy no more of God in the duty than such an one. O, how sad is this! and yet how prone are we to give way unto this drowsiness

Digitized by Google

of spirit in prayer! It creeps insensibly upon the soul, as sleep doth upon the body, the heart is gone before the Christian is well aware of it. The more need, therefore, is there to watch against it. Thirdly, Because Satan is so watchful against prayer, therefore it behoves the Christian to watch unto prayer. Where should the strongest guard be set, but where the enemy maketh his fiercest assault? This is the fort he batters, and labours with all his might to beat the Christian from. What he doth otherwise against the Christian is on a design to hinder his prayers, 1 Peter iii. 7. Indeed, the soul never falls fully into his hands, till it throws up this duty;—'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Sometimes the city is taken, and the enemy is forced back again by those in the castle, which commands the city. Prayer is like such a castle, sometimes the Christian hath nothing left him but a spirit of prayer, and with this he beats back the devil out of all his advantages.

CHAPTER XV.

SHEWS WHEREIN THE DUTY OF WATCHING IN PRAYER LIES.

We shall now shew the second thing wherein the Christian is to exercise his watchfulness in reference to this duty. Take it in three particulars.

Section I.—He is to shew his watchfulness before prayer, and that, first, by watching for the fit season to pray in. We cannot be always on our knees; we may serve God all the day, but worship him we cannot; this is a duty that requires set times for its exercise. It is our duty to watch for the season of prayer. The Christian should endeavour to dispose his occasions so that his devotions be not shut out, or crowded up into straits of time, nor interfere with other necessary duties. Many duties are spoiled by being unseasonably performed. He is to keep a strict watch over himself in his whole course; first, by shuuning all that may defile his conscience, and so render him unmeet for communion with God. The priest was to watch himself, that he touched no unclean thing, God thereby signifying, that he will have them to be holy in their lives that approach near to him in the duties of his worship. Secondly, By a holy care, to observe and lay up the most remarkable passages of God's providence to him, as also the frame and behaviour of his own heart to God, in the interval between prayer and prayer; the want of this is the cause why we are so barren in the performance of this duty. It is no wonder he should want matter for his prayer at night, who did not treasure up what passed in the day between God and him. Though the minister be not making his sermon all the week, yet by observing what may be useful for him in that work, he is furnished with many hints that help him when he goes about it; such an advantage the Christian will find for prayer, by laying up the remarkable instances of God's providence toward him, and of his carriage toward God under them; these will furnish him with necessary materials for the performance. The bag is filling while the kine are feeding, or chewing the cud, and accordingly yields the milk plentifully at night; truly, thus it is here,—that Christian must needs be most fruitful and plentiful in his devotions, when he comes to pour out his heart to God in prayer, that hath been thus filling it all the day with meditations suitable to the duty. Would he praise God? He hath the preservations, deliverances, and assistances which God hath given to him at hand, in his memory, which another hath lost for want of writing them down in this book of remembrance. Would he humbly confess the sins of the day? He presently recalls,—In this company I spake unadvisedly with my lips; in that enjoyment I observed my heart to be inordinate; this duty I omitted,—in that I was negligent. Now, what a wonderful help hath such a saint (above another that walks at random) to get his soul into a melting frame! The eye affects the heart, the presence of the object actuates the affection. How can they mourn for the sins of the day at night, who remember them no more than Nebuchadnezzar his dream? Thirdly, By the frequent exercise of ejaculatory prayer. He doth not watch to pray, who never thinks on God but when he is on his knees; for by thus long discontinuing his acquaintance with God, he indisposeth himself for the more solemn addresses to him. The Christian will find, that the oftener he is refreshing his spirit with those little sips and short gusts of heaven, the larger draught he will be able to take when he returns to his

Digitized by Google

set meal of morning and evening prayer: for by these he will be prepared for farther communion with God; these short walks often taken, keep the soul in breath for a longer journey.

SECTION II.—He must watch in prayer. It is not enough to watch the child that he goes to school, but the master's eye must watch him in school. Thou dost well to take care of thyself before prayer, but wilt thou now leave it at the school-door? Truly then all thy former care is to little purpose. First, Thou must watch thy outward man, and rouse that up from sleep and sloth. If the body be heavy-eyed in prayer, the soul must needs be heavy-heeled. 'Watch and pray,' saith Christ to his disciples; he knew they could not do that work sleeping; and yet how many do we see at the very time of prayer, so far from watching, that they invite sleep to come upon them by laying themselves in a lazy posture! Certainly, friends, communion with God is worth keeping our eyes open. I wonder any can sleep at the worship of God, and not dream of hell-fire. But it is not enough to keep the eye awake, if thou sufferest it to wander; 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way,' Psa. cxix. 37. Secondly, thou must watch thy soul in prayer. The soul is the man; and the soul in prayer is the very soul of prayer. Watch what its ends and aims are, that it shoots not beside the mark; watch what strength and force thy soul puts to the work: our prayers miscarry by shooting short as well as wide. In a word, thou must keep thy heart with all diligence from one end of the duty to the other, or else it will give thee the slip. How often do our souls begin to speak with God in prayer, and on a sudden get into idle talk with the world! One while our hearts are warm at the work, and we pursue hard after God with our affections; but instantly we are at a loss, and cold again. David was sensible of this, and therefore we have him, in the midst of this duty, begging help from God to call in his gadding heart; 'Unite my heart to fear thy name,' Psa. lxxxvi. 11.

SECTION III.—The Christian is to watch after prayer; First, By calling his soul to a review concerning the duty, how it was performed by him. God himself, when he had finished his works of creation, looked back upon them, Gen. i. 31. He hath given us a faculty to reflect upon our actions, and expects we should use it; yea, complains of those that do not consider their ways and doings. He that looks not back how he prayed, can he be humbled for the sins that cleaved to his prayers? And will God pardon what the Christian takes no care to know, that he may show his repentance? Or will he mend those faults in the next prayer, which he found not out in the former? No, but rather increase them. This the sluggard, whose soul will soon run into a wilderness, and be overgrown with those sins, which may choke the very spirit of supplication in him. Secondly, By observing what is the success of his prayer. As he is to look back and see how he prayed, so forward to observe what return he finds of his prayer. To pray, and not watch what becomes of our prayer is a great folly, and no little sin. What is this but to take the name of God in vain? Yet thus do many knock at God's door, and then run away to the world, and think no more of their prayers; like Pilate, who asked Christ, 'What is truth?' and when he had said this, went out to the Jews, forgetting what he asked. David did not think prayer such an idle errand; Psa. v. 3: 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord: in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.' First, He is careful to take his aim right in delivering this arrow of prayer, which he sends with a message to heaven,—'I will direct my prayer to thee;' then he is as careful to observe where his arrow lights, and what answer is made to it,—'and I will look up,' which amounts to as much as,—'I will hear what God the Lord will speak,' Psa. lxxxv. 8; that is, to him concerning the prayer which in those words immediately foregoing he had made,—'Shew us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation,' ver. 7. This, Christian, is to watch unto prayer, to wait for answers to prayer. Mordecai, no doubt, had put up many prayers for Esther, and therefore he waits at the king's gate, looking what answer God would in his providence give thereunto.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEREIN THE CHRISTIAN'S WATCH IS SET FOR HIM ABOUT PRAYER.

THE third thing is to help the Christian in setting his watch, or to give some directions how he may keep his heart in a watchful frame; for which take in these particulars.

SECTION I.—First, Harbour not any known sin in thy bosom. Sin hath two contrary effects on the conscience; either it fills the conscience with horror, or benumbs and stupifies it; the latter is the more common. Suffer the devil to anoint thy temples with this opium, and thou art in danger to fall into the sleeping disease of a stupid conscience; and thou wilt have little inclination then to pray. Or if it have the other effect upon thee, thou wilt be as much afraid, as now thou hast little desire, to pray. Secondly, Beware of any excess in thy affection to the creature. A drunken man, of all others, is most unfitting to watch; such an one will be asleep as soon as he is set in his chair. Now all inordinancy of affection is a spiritual drunkenness; Christ joins both together,—'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares,' Luke xxi. 34. It is a preservative against drunkenness of spirit, that the day of the Lord might not come upon them unawares; and of the two, the drunkenness of the affection is the worst; he that is bodily drunk over-night, is sober by the morning; but he that is overcharged with the cares or love of the world, rises as drunk as he lay down, and how can he then watch unto prayer? We have therefore these two joined together,—'Let us watch and be sober,' 1 Thess. v. 6. 'Be ye therefore sober, and watch,' 1 Peter iv. 7. Whatever the affection is, the intemperance of it lays the soul under a distemper, and indisposeth it for prayer. Is it sorrow? Our Saviour finds his disciples sleeping for sorrow, when they should have watched and prayed, Luke xxii. 45. Is it love? This laid Samson asleep in Delilah's lap. The heart of man hath not room enough for God and the world too: the heart which spends itself in mourning for worldly crosses, will find the stream run low when he should weep for his sins: if the cares of this life fill his head and heart, he will have little inclination to wait on God for spiritual purposes.

SECTION II.—Thirdly, Resist this spiritual drowsiness when it first creeps upon thee. Sleep is easier kept off when approaching, than shaken off when it hath got possession and bound the senses. This sleepy disease of the soul steals insensibly upon us; when, therefore, thou findest it coming, rouse up thyself; as a man who hath business to do would start up from his chair to shake off his drowsiness. Now, thou mayest observe these few symptoms of this distemper. First, An unwillingness to duty. If thou findest this, it appears thou beginnest to be heavy-eyed; when grace is wakeful, the Christian needs not many words to persuade him to come into God's presence: 'Thou saidst, Seek my face; my heart said, Thy face will I seek.' Therefore conclude thou mayest. He that would run to the door, when awake, at the first knock of his dear friend, to let him in, may, when between sleeping and waking, let him stand too long; this was the spouse's case, and she lost the company of her beloved: it showed plainly she was in a sleepy distemper, in that she was so backward in duty, for that was the door Christ would have met her at. Secondly, Formality in prayer is a certain symptom that a sleepy distemper hangs about thee; grace awake is full of life and activity, at least it discovers itself by making the soul deeply sensible of its deadness, and it proves the soul awake that can feelingly confess its deadness. Thirdly, Prevalency of wandering thoughts. In sleep, fancy and imagination rule without control. If thy thoughts range in time of prayer, and meet with no check from thee, it shews thy grace is not awake.

SECTION III.—Fourthly, Express a conscientious diligence at thy particular calling in the intervals of prayer. They that sit up to watch had need of some work to keep them awake; idleness is but one remove from sleep. I cannot believe that he who wasteth a day away in idleness, should find his heart awake to pray at night, for he hath that day lived in the neglect of a duty as necessary as this; and it is bad going to one duty through the neglect of another. There is a generation of men, that, under a pretence of watching and praying always, betake themselves to their cloisters, and renounce all secular employ-

Digitized by Google

ments, as if it were as easy to put off the world as to change their clothes; but the world hath found those places commonly to have proved, not houses to pray in, but dens to draw their prey into. It is more likely that those who are pampered with sloth and fulness of bread, should be eaten up with luxury and sensuality than with zeal and devotion. The air, when still, thickens and corrupts; the spirits in our body are choked with rest; and the soul needs motion and exercise as much as either; in spiritual offices it cannot hold without intermission, therefore, God hath provided our particular callings as a relief to our spiritual devotions, only our care must be not to overdo. The same thing may quicken and weaken,—wake us, and lay us asleep. There is no greater help to our religious offices, than a faithful discharge of our particular calling; but when it is inordinately pursued, it makes the spirit of prayer dull and heavy. Fifthly, Preserve a sense of thy spiritual wants. As fulness inclines the body to sleep; so doth a conceit of spiritual fulness, the soul: when the belly is full, then the bones would be at rest,—the man hath a greater inclination to sleep than to work; whereas, he that is pinched with hunger, his empty stomach keeps him awake. If once thy spiritual hunger be a little stayed (from a conceit of thy grace), thou wilt say, with the rich man, 'Take thy ease, O my soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years.' The Corinthians are a sad instance of this; 1 Cor. iv. 8: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us;' Paul is now nobody with you; the time hath been you could not do without him; the hungry child did no more cry for the breast, than you for the word preached; but now your stomach is stayed, you are full, and can live without him: whereas, it was a fulness of pride, not of grace. It is the nature of grace to dilate the heart, and make room for more; but of pride, to cloy the soul. God hath long kept open house in England; the wine-cellar door of his ordinances hath not been shut upon us, we have had free access to drink, and that abundantly, of their sweet wine: but, alas! may it not be for a lamentation to see, how many are drunk with spiritual pride, rather than filled with grace, after so long an enjoyment of God's ordinances? Such yet there are, who decry all ordinances, and who can live without public preaching and private praying also. There are others who are not so mad-drunk, but yet are fallen asleep; they have lost their first life in, and love to, ordinances; they sit with sleepy eyes and dead hearts under them. Well, Christian, if thou wouldst keep thy soul awake, take heed thou losest not the sense of thy wants. Begging is the poor man's trade; when thou beginnest to conceit thyself rich, then thou wilt be in danger of giving it over.

SECTION IV.—Sixthly, Retire often to muse on some soul-awaking meditations. We seldom sleep when we are thoughtful, especially if the thoughts we muse on be of weight and importance enough to occupy the mind: indeed, trivial thoughts, such as have nothing to invite attention, are given as a ready means to lull a man asleep. That Christian who neglects frequently to meditate on spiritual things, and lets his thoughts walk all day in company with carnal, worldly occasions, I should wonder if he finds his heart awake at night to pray in a spiritual manner. Give me, therefore, leave to present a few subjects for thy meditation, and they will be as the alarm which men set over night to call them early in the morning. Meditate on Christ's coming to judgment. Surely thou wilt not easily sleep while this trumpet, that shall call all mankind to judgment, shall sound in thy ear. The reason why men sleep so soundly is, because they either do not believe this, or at least do not think of it seriously. The servant that looks for his master, would be loth to be found in bed when he comes. Christ hath told us he will come, but not when, that we might never put off our clothes,—'Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come,' Matt. xxiv. 42. There are, indeed, negative signs concerning his coming to the general judgment of the world, by which we may know he will not yet come; as the fall of Babylon, the calling of the Jews, and other prophecies, that must be fulfilled, before he comes: but there are none from which we can conclude that his coming to any of us by death, and summon us to our judgment before his bar, shall not yet be. Thou art young, thou canst not therefore say, thou shalt not die as yet; alas! measure the coffins in the churchyard, and thou wilt find some of thy length: young and old are within the reach of death's scythe; old men, indeed, go to death, their age calls for it; but young

Digitized by Google

men cannot hinder death's coming unto them. Thou art rich,—will this excuse thee? Rich men, indeed, can get others to serve for them here, when their prince calls them forth to war; but there is no discharge in this war. Solomon tells us, thou must personally do this. Thou art strong and lusty, thou canst not say, that death will be longer at work in felling thee down. Some, indeed, he cuts down by chips, in consumptive diseases, they die piece-meal; others he tears up in one night, as a tree by a tempest: think of this, and thy sleep will depart from thee. Secondly, Consider, the devil is always awake. Is it time for them in the city to sleep, when the enemy without watch? Our Saviour takes it for granted, 'If the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up,' Matt. xxiv. 44. Would Saul have slept in his trench if he had thought David had been so near? Or, would Sisera have lain down to rest, if he had seen the hammer and nail in Jael's hand to drive through his temples? The devil is at thy door; and is not that enough to keep thee out of thy bed of sloth? What day in all the year is inconvenient to Satan? What place or company art thou in, that he cannot make a snare for thy soul? What member of thy body, or faculty of thy soul, which is not in danger to be abused by him? Hast thou an inmate in thy own bosom, that watcheth to open the gate to him? And is there not a constant correspondence between them? O, how often doth he beat us with our own staff! And shall we not always watch and pray, when he watcheth to tempt? Shall not we keep our correspondence with God and Christ, our allies in heaven, as he doth with our flesh? Shall thy enemy seek to cut thy throat, and wilt not thou rise to save it? Consider, wicked men are awake, and hard at work for Satan and their lusts. O may it not put the Christian to shame! Thirdly, Consider how watchful the men of the world are to follow their worldly business; do they not rise early, and go to bed late, grudging the very time that is spent to refresh nature in the night with sleep, so bent are they upon their carnal projects! The philosopher observed this, and felt ashamed at suffering the smith to be at his anvil in the morning, sooner than he was at his book. O Christian, should it not make thee blush much more, to see the whole town up, and as busy as bees in a garden, one flying this way, another that way, and all to bring a little more of this world's perishing pelf into their hive, out of which, death ere long will drive them, and force them to leave what with so much pains they have gathered for others; while thou sleepest away thy precious time, though thou art sure to carry thy gettings into the other world with thee, and there enjoy the fruit of thy short labour here with everlasting glory! Nay, consider how watchful the wicked are to take all opportunities to pursue their works of darkness; the adulterer for the twilight to meet his minion; and wilt not thou watch unto prayer, that thou mayest fill thy soul with spiritual loves in communion with thy God? The thief is up at midnight to get his prey; and wilt not thou break thy rest a little to obtain a richer treasure than is to be found in the coffers of the richest princes? Shall these be at so much pains to satisfy their lusts, and thou take none to honour and enjoy thy God? O, what a shame was it to the heavy-eyed disciples, that they could not watch to pray with their Master, when Judas, that bold traitor, was so wakeful, as to be up in the dead of the night to betray him into his murderers' hands! Fourthly, Consider how short the time is that thou art desired to watch: 'Could ye not watch with me one hour?' Matt. xxvi. 40. Ere long, Christian, thou shalt be called off thy guard, and then thou shalt have all rest, though no sleep: it is but for this short life thou art put to stand upon this hard duty; and is that so long? O, how soon is a life past at play or sin? The great complaint such make, is, time is short; they wish they could clip its wings. Is time so short and sweet to spend in sin; and can it be tedious to thee to bestow it in devotion? Why should an hour in the closet be thought by a saint long, when day and night spent in an alehouse is too short for the sinner? Above all, consider whether it be not better to watch and pray here on earth for a few days, than to wake in hell under endless torments. Fifthly, Consider seriously how great a loser thou hast been already in thy heavenly trade, for want of watching. It is with the Christian, as with some negligent merchant, who takes notice of some loss of a round sum, that befalls him; at this he cries out he shall be undone: but regards not the pence

Digitized by Google

and shillings that he idly spends, nor considers the loss which follows upon his daily negligence; whereas would he count what in this way was lost, he might find that it amounts to more than the other. Thus the Christian sometimes is troubled for one great sin into which he hath fallen, but withal, he observes not how negligently he performs his duties; how he sometimes prays coldly, for want of due preparation, and what little fruit comes for want of watchfulness after it, whereby in time he falls low; whereas if he could bring the several items of these particular losses together, he would find them swell into a sad reckoning, except, with these losses, he hath also lost the tenderness of his conscience. And shall a careless Christian add to his stock? Did you ever go by the sluggard's field, and not find it overgrown with thorns? Wouldst thou but make it thy business daily to watch thy heart, how thou prayest, and how thou walkest after prayer, thou shouldst find a blessed change in thy spiritual affairs; this strictness will at first be uneasy, but every day will wear it off, and a sweet facility follow, when thou shalt see thy gains come rolling in by it. He that finds how well he is paid for his diligence, by the increase of his estate, will not envy the sluggard his ease, when he shall see him walk by his door in rags. It was the saying once of a rich man, who by God's blessing on his diligence, had raised a vast estate, that at his first setting up in the world, he got a little with much trouble; but afterwards he got his great gains with little trouble. And thou, Christian, wilt find the same in thy spiritual trade; thy trouble will be most at first, but thy gains most at last; because the way of godliness, by use and experience, will become easy and delightful. Sixthly, Consider what others lose by thy not watching; he that lives in a town, wrongs his neighbour as well as himself, by not looking to his fence. Thus one Christian may injure many, by not keeping his own watch. First, Thy very example is a wrong to others, for this sleeping disease is catching; thy loose conversation may make others do the same: it is no small blessing to live among active Christians, whose zeal and forwardness in the ways of God is exemplary; this puts courage in those that follow them; the heavenly, holy conversation of a master, is a help to the whole family. Secondly, Thou indisposest thyself for doing thy duty to them; we are commanded to watch over one another in love, as those that are concerned in our brethren's welfare. Now how unfit is he to watch over others, that doth not watch himself;—to provoke others to love and to good works, who needs himself the spur? Lastly, Consider Christ's watchful care over thee. Look upon him in his providence; that eye which neither sleeps by night, nor slumbers by day, is thy constant keeper: consider him in his intercession, there he prays for thee, watching thereunto with all perseverance; 'For he lives to make intercession for his saints:' consider him in his Spirit; what is he, but Christ's messanger, sent as our guardian, to take care of the saints in his absence? Consider him in the gospel ministry, which is set up for this very purpose, to watch for your souls; yea, every private saint hath a charge to be his brother's keeper; this well considered, would make thee, first, watchful to promote his glory that so carefully provides for thy safety. What put David into such a rage against Nabal, but the disrespect that his servants found at his hands, to whom he had been so serviceable? 'In vain have I kept all that this fellow hath.' Secondly, it would make thee the more watchful over thy own soul, if thou hadst so much ingenuity as to fear grieving of thy God, who expresseth his tender care over thee: what greater grief can the indulgent parent have, than to see his child not mind his own good, after all his care and cost upon him?

CHAPTER XVII.

WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE.

These words contain the first branch in the apostle's direction for prayer; which I shall despatch briefly in four heads.

Section I.—For the importance of the phrase. Here is perseverance, yea, all perseverance required in prayer. First, The word προσκαρτερησει, here used, comes from κάρτος, the same with κρατος (a letter only transposed to melt the sound), signifies 'strength' and 'victory;' and hence its compound, προσκαρτέρειν, is to prosecute any business with an unwearied constancy, till

Digitized by Google

all difficulties be conquered, and the thing at last be accomplished. It is used for the diligence and labour of dogs, that follow the chase, till at last they get the game pursued: it is applied also to lacqueys, that with great labour run after their masters, and are at their hand in a journey. In Scripture it is frequently applied to the duty of prayer; as, Acts vi. 4; Col. iv. 2; Rom xii. 12; and signifies that invincible patience, courage and constancy, which a Christian is to shew in upholding the duty of prayer. But are 'praying always,' in the beginning of this verse, and this 'praying with perseverance' the same? Or, if they are not the same, where lies the difference? It cannot be thought the apostle, giving directions for prayer, would let them interfere one with another, and in so short a space repeat the same over again in other words: the rest are all distinct; so we will take these. Calvin makes this to be the difference: By 'praying always,' saith he, he exhorts us to pray in prosperity as well as in adversity: and not then to intermit the practice of this duty, because not driven to it by such outward, pressing necessities; but by 'praying with perseverance,' he admonisheth, that we be not weary of the work, but continue instant and constant in its performance, though we have not presently what we pray for. By 'praying always,' we are exhorted to the daily, constant exercise of the duty of prayer; not to neglect the seasons for prayer as they return upon us: by 'praying with perseverance,' we are pressed to bear up against discouragements, as to any particular request we make at the throne of grace, and not to give over, though we have not a speedy answer to it; so that the former is opposed to a neglect of the duty in its stated seasons, and the latter to a fainting in our spirits, as to any particular suit we put up. We may keep our constant course of prayer, and yet not persevere in prayer, for this or that mercy which God withholds some time for the exercise of our grace.

Secondly, I must show what is meant by 'all perseverance.' First, By 'all perseverance' is meant such a perseverance as holds out to the end, till God doth give the thing we pray for, or takes away the subject of our prayer, as he did in David's case for his sick child by his death. It is possible a soul may persevere, yet at last faint, when it sees the time for answering still protracted; God still stays, and there is no news of his coming, after many a despatch sent to heaven upon that occasion. O, it is hard to hold up our hands with Moses, to the going down of the sun! Christ complains how rare and scarce such a faith is to be found, when he bears long before he throws in the mercy prayed for: 'Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Luke xviii. 8. Shall he find so much faith as to keep his people at prayer in expectation of his coming to their relief? Secondly, By 'all perseverance' is meant a perseverance of the whole man in prayer. We must not only persevere to hold up the outward performance of the duty of prayer, but persevere to exert the inward powers of our souls and their graces, in the duty. The duty may be kept up, and the heart down in performing it. The faith, zeal, and other graces of the soul may be gone or act but feebly; like an army that hath not yet quitted the field, but whose powder and shot are all spent; there they stand, and put a good face on it, but can do little or nothing to offend the enemy, or defend themselves. Thus many in afflictions pray still, they have not yet given over the duty, and run out of the field; but, alas! their faith fails, and there is little vigour in the performance; here is some kind of perseverance, but not this 'all perseverance,' which above all requires the perseverance of grace on its actings at the duty. So we translate the word, Rom. xii. 12; what is here 'with perseverance,' is there 'continuing instant in prayer.' Some are instant, but it lasts not; if they find the mercy comes, they draw hard; but if their chariot of prayer be set, and after a pull or two the mercy comes not, their faith jades, and they give over: others are constant, but not instant: they continue to pray, but pray for themselves cold; they grow lifeless at the work, as if they looked for nothing to come of it; we must join both together, or expect benefit from neither.

Section II.—I proceed to shew why we must pray with all perseverance. First, it is strictly commanded, 1 Thess. v. 17: 'Pray without ceasing;' that is, without fainting; so our Saviour, Luke xviii. 1, 'spake a parable unto them to this end, this men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' Mark, not only

Digitized by Google

that they might, but ought. It is, indeed, a high privilege to us, and a great condescension in the high God, to give us leave thus to lie at his door, and to suffer our prayers to be ever sounding in his ears. We should not like to have beggars knocking day and night at our doors; but so infinitely good is God, that he not only allows us this boldness, but commands it; that the fear of a sin might move us, if the loss of a privilege will not. Secondly, This perseverance in prayer is highly commended: indeed, perseverance crowns every grace, and commends every duty, it is not our faith and hope, but to hold fast our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope firm to the end, that God looks at, Heb. iii. 6; not the seeming zeal and swiftness of our motion in the ways of God at our first start, but the constancy of a well-breathed soul in holding on his course till the race be finished, that Christ commends: 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed,' John viii. 31. So in prayer, it is not the short spirits of an inconstant zeal, that begins to pray (as they say the French do to fight) like thunder and lightning, but if the first charge carries it not, then they are cowed in their spirits: no, it is not this soft metal whose edge is thus easily turned, that God likes in prayer, but a zeal tempered and hardened so with resolution, that it cuts through all delays and difficulties; this God highly commends: it got Jacob the name of a prince, so nobly he behaved in this duty, holding it out till break of day with God, and then would not let him go till he had blessed him. Thirdly, it is that which God intends by his delays and seeming denials. Why deals he thus with his people? Surely it is to put their graces to the trial, whether they will quit the siege for a few repulses, or fall on with more courage; he holds his peace, to make them cry the louder; steps aside, to make them more eagerly seek after him. Now, two things God aims at especially by his people's perseverance in prayer. First, His own glory. What fairer occasion can the Christian have in his whole life to honour God, than by holding fast his integrity, and keeping his allegiance to him firm, when he seems to be neglected, yea, forsaken of him? Certainly God would never have put Job to so much trouble, nor have made him pray and stay so long for the gracious issues of his providence, but to glorify himself in the faith and patience of his servant. 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord,' James v. 11. Truly, we could not have heard so much of his patience, if we had not heard so much of his troubles; had God put an end sooner to them, he might have had more ease, but not God more honour. This was it that God was please with, and counted himself highly honoured by, that Satan, with all his wiles, could not make Job give over praying, much less curse God; no, not when God broke him with his tempest, and seemed not to regard him or his prayers. It pleaseth us most, when our prayers are in heaven and back again quickly: but it glorifies God most, when he lays an embargo (as I may say) upon our prayers, so that no answer comes from heaven to us, and yet we will send more after them, as Jacob did Benjmin after his other son: when the poor soul will not be taken off the duty by any intervening discouragements, but presseth harder upon God from his seeming denials, this is indeed to give glory to God; 'Blessed is he that hath not seen, and yet thus believes.' Secondly, God by his people's persevering long in prayer, before he gives in his gracious answer, intends them no small advantage. First, He usually pays them interest for their forbearance; the longer they pray, the more redundant the mercy is when it comes. Such a mercy that comes as an answer to persevering prayers is compared to the husbandman's gains at harvest, which abundantly recompenseth his whole year's patience; 'In due season we shall reap, if we faint not,' Gal. vi. 9. The breast is filling for the child, while the mother is sleeping: God sometimes seems to sleep and forget his poor children that cry to him, but he is preparing the fuller for them. Secondly, Such mercies as are got with long and great difficulties, come with sweetest manifestations of divine love. 'O woman, great is thy faith!' Matt xv. 28. This poor woman had not her request so soon granted as some others, but she lost nothing by it; for with the recovery of her child (which was all her errand) she carries away with her a high testimony from Christ's own mouth to the truth and eminence of her grace. Thirdly, Such mercies as are the issues of persevering prayers, are received usually with more joy and thankfulness than others: partly because the Christian's desires are more

Digitized by Google

intense, and so he tastes more sweetness in the mercy; also, because such mercies give disappointment to the Christian's many fears: when God tarries, we are prone to question whether he will come or no. 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more: Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore?' Psa. lxxvii. 7, 8. See how many sad thoughts gathered about this good man's heart; which though they did not overthrow his chariot of prayer, yet clogged his wheels, and made him drive with a heavy heart. Now, for a mercy to break out of so dark a cloud, must needs bring such a glory with it, as to ravish the soul with joy, and enlarge it into thankfulness. Those judgments dispirit sinner most, which come after long peace and prosperity, when they think the danger is over, and the bitterness of death is even past: as in Haman's case, who was sent to the gallows after he had vaunted how he was invited to the queen's banquet; this strange turn made it a double death to him: so mercies that surprise the saint after he hath prayed long, and can hear no tidings that they are on their way, O, how it affects his heart with joy and gratitude! The church had prayed without ceasing for Peter in prison, but still he remained there even to the very time when Herod would have brought him forth, probably to his execution. Now, when he came himself to bring them the joyful news that their prayers were heard, (while they were instant at the work,) it is said 'they were astonished,' Acts xii. 16. Fourthly, Such mercies are usually more holily used and improved; for God holds his people long at prayer for a mercy, many times for this very end, to prepare and season their hearts, that, when they have it, they may know the better how to employ it for his glory, and their own good. Hannah prayed long for a son, but none was given; this made her add a vow to her prayer; 'If thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life,' 1 Sam. i. 11. Happy was it for this good woman she had not her desire sooner; if she had received him at first, perhaps she had never given him back to God again. The Lord sometimes forbears to give a mercy to us, only to make us more earnest in glorifing him when we have it.

The last advantage that comes to the Christian by perseverance in prayer, is when the mercy is at last denied; and it is this,—it will enable and dispose him to bear the denial more meekly and holily than another. He that is impatient, and cannot wait on God for a mercy, will not easily submit to him in a denial; whereas he that keeps up a spirit of prayer for it, when God comes to take away the subject of his prayer, will acquiesce, now he sees that God hath fully declared his will in the thing. Job lets not a day pass without prayer for his children: and how does the man behave himself when they are slain? Doth he fret and fume? Doth he curse God for making them a sacrifice for whom he had offered so many sacrifices? No, he meekly submits to his holy will, he opens not his mouth against him, but in praises to him. So David, when his child was dead, (for whom while living he ceased not passionately to pray,) to show how well satisfied he was with Divine Providence, he washeth his cheeks, puts off his mourning, and goes to the house of God to worship, 2 Sam. xii. 20. Prayer is a great heart-easer: it breathes out those distempered passions, which being bound up in others, break out, when God at any time crosseth them in their will.

Section III.—Having shewn why we are to persevere in prayer, I come now to press the duty home. Christ bestowed a parable on his disciples for this very end, to shew that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; surely then it deserves an exhortation. Now to enforce it, take five particulars. First, The prevalency of perseverance in prayer. This is emphatically expressed by that question of our Saviour in his parable upon this subject, Luke xviii. 7, 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, that cry night and day unto him, though he bear long with them?' As if he had said, Can you think that God will send away those who are so near and dear to him, his own elect, with a denial; and that, when he hath made full proof of their faith and patience, in waiting long upon him for an answer? 'I tell you, saith Christ, 'that he will avenge them speedily,' ver. 8. Men seek to please their constant customers: so will God those that are constantly trading with him at the throne of grace. 'They that wait upon the Lord shall not be ashamed.' David is careful, for our encouragement, to let us know how well he succeeded after his long waiting at God's

Digitized by Google

door, Psa. xl. 1: 'I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry;' in the Hebrew, 'in waiting I waited:' that is, I staid waiting long, and at last he came. But David was a favourite; may others expect to succeed as well as he did? see ver. 3: 'Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.' Answer of prayers is a covenant privilege; it is not a monopoly given to one or two, but a charter granted to the whole corporation of saints to the end of the world, Psa. cii. 17: 'He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.' Now mark what follows,—'This shall be written for the generation to come,' ver. 18. Secondly, Thy persevering in prayer will help to evidence thy state to be gracious. The hypocrite is often exposed here: 'Will he always call upon God?' Job xxvii. 10. An unsound heart will be meddling with this duty now and then, but grows weary of the work at last, especially if he be made to wait long for an answer. Saul prays to God, and because he hears not from him, goes at last to seek the devil. Observe what effect God's frowns and seeming denials produce in thy heart, and thou mayest know the temper of thy spirit thereby. Do they wear off thy edge for prayer, or sharpen it? Do they make thee fall off, and send thee away from God with clamours in thy mouth, and discontent in thy heart, resolved to beg no more there, or do they make thee fall on with more courage, and enkindle thy affections to God and this duty more ardently? Truly, if thou findest the latter, thou mayest conclude, if this instant constancy in prayer be for spiritual blessings, that divine virtue hath gone from Christ into thy soul:—'O woman, great is thy faith!' Thirdly, Consider the great folly of fainting in prayer. Perhaps thou art in a deserted condition; thou prayest for comfort, but none comes; for victory over such a temptation without, or corruption within, but art foiled in both; therefore thou first faintest in the duty, and then givest it over: what egregious folly! Because mercy comes not in haste to thee, therefore thou wilt run from it, which thou dost in ceasing to pray. When the fisherman misseth his draught, he doth not give over his trade, but mendeth his net. O cease not to pray, but mend thy praying: double thy diligence, and all shall be well at last. Whatever the mercy is thou wouldst have, must it not come from God's hands? Now, will God give the mercy to thee, who rejectest his counsel for the obtaining of it? Is not prayer, with all perseverance, the way he directs all his people to take? God, for reasons best known to himself, stays some while before he comes to his tempted, distressed servants, for their deliverance; but leaves orders when any of them ail anything (so the word κακοπαθει, James v. 13, signifies), that they should pray, apply themselves to the use of this duty, yea, continue the spiritual, constant use of it till he comes; and withal assures us he will come soon enough to save us. Now, what folly is it to cast off this means so strictly prescribed! Surely, though there were nothing else, this is enough to turn God back, when on his way of mercy to do us good. Fourthly, Consider it is as sinful as it is foolish to give over this duty. 'Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God,' Job xv. 4. It is a high crime for one trusted with a castle to deliver it cowardly into his enemies' hands, especially if he hath wherewithal to defend it. Hath not God provided sufficiently to enable the Christian to maintain this duty against all the armies of men and devils, afflictions and temptations, that can oppose it? Princes are most careful to enforce and supply frontier castles above others for defence, because they are most assaulted. Prayer is a duty that is as much opposed by Satan as any, and hath many other difficulties that render it no easy matter for the Christian to be instant and constant at it. God hath considered this, and accordingly hath provided succour. He gives his Spirit to help the Christian (because of his many infirmities) what and how to pray; who, if he be used kindly, will not be wanting to assist him in the work; and while the Spirit is ready to pray in him, Christ is as ready in heaven to pray for him, who also sends the precious promises of the gospel to assure the soul that relief is coming, be the affliction or temptation ever so great that besets it. Now, to faint in the work, and by giving over the duty to open the gates of his soul for Satan to enter and triumph over God with his insulting blasphemies, what gracious soul that doth not tremble at the thought! We cannot cast off prayer, but we cast some dishonourable reflection upon God; for every real defect in the creature proceeds from an

Digitized by Google

imaginary defect which he supposeth to be in God. Now the causes from which this fainting in prayer proceed, are all evil and bitter. Lastly, As it is foolish and evil, so it is of dangerous consequence to ourselves to faint, and cease to pray. First, It is the ready way to bring some stinging affliction upon us. Art thou a servant of God, and fliest from his face? Expect a storm to bring thee back to thy work. Art thou a child, and playest the truant? Expect that thy heavenly Father will send thee to school with a rod at thy back. Secondly, Cease to pray, and thou wilt begin to sin. Prayer is not only a means to prevail for mercy, but also to prevent sin. 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' The thief comes when the candles are out; Christ could not keep his disciples awake at their devotions, and how soon were they put to the rout when the tempter came! When the courtier in discontent gives over his attendance at court, he is more easily persuaded into disloyal practices. Discontent softens the heart to receive sinful impressions from the tempter. 'Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God,' Job. xv. 4. Eliphaz's doctrine was true, though his application was false. Sins of commission are the usual punishments that God inflicts on persons for sins of omission: he that leaves a duty, may fear to be left to commit a crime; he that turns his ear from the truth, takes the ready course to be given over to believe fables, 2 Tim. iv. 4: he that casteth off prayer, it is a wonder if you find him not, ere long, cast into some foul sin.

SECTION IV.—The last thing is a word of counsel for the Christian's help and direction in this work of perseverance in prayer. Now this will lay before you the several causes of a person's falling off from this duty, or fainting in it, which are divers. First, Sometimes the cause is the want of a lasting principle to keep us constantly to the duty. That sometimes which sets the creature to prayer, is not pure obedience to the command, but a desire to obtain some particular mercy, which, if obtained, the fish being caught, the net is laid aside; or if he prays long, and hath it not, he grows weary of the work, and lets it fall. Be sure, therefore, to pray in obedience; bind the duty upon thy conscience, and thou wilt not easily shake it off. 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,' 1 Sam. xii. 23. He had little encouragement from them he prayed for to continue at the work, but his obedience to God held him to it. This is a strong fence indeed to guard the heart; we cannot break through this hedge without feeling the thorns in our side. A gracious soul dreads nothing more than guilt: tell him it is a sin to cease praying, and you say enough. What though God answers not my prayer, his silence to my prayer must not deter me from praying. Prayer is still a duty: God is not bound to answer presently when we pray: but we are bound to pray, though he doth not answer. 'All this is come upon us,' saith the church, 'yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant,' Psa. xliv. 17. Remember, Christian, thou art a covenant servant, and one thing thou art, as such, bound to do, is to pray to thy God without ceasing, 1 Thess. v. 17; this will defend thee against any motion which the tempter suggests to the contrary. The beggar knocks at the rich man's door, and if he be not served, away he goes; but the servant, though he be hungry, doth not run away because he hath not his dinner so soon as he desires.

Secondly, Sometimes not persevering in prayer comes from pride. 'This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?' 2 Kings vi. 33. What a haughty spirit was here! Pride likes not to wait, but to be waited on. He in the gospel was ashamed to beg, much more to stand long at the door upon a begging errand. Now, though this be a disease which a saint is more free from than other men, yet there are dregs enough still within him to disturb his spirit, if he be not daily emptying them out; it will not therefore be amiss to leave a few soul-humbling considerations, which you may be often taking, especially when you feel any remains of this sin about you, and your hearts begin to grow discontented, because God makes you stay so long for any mercy prayed for. First, Consider what it is to pray: it is to beg for alms, not to demand a debt. Now, doth it become you, in so poor a condition, to be so quick and short with your God? If you live without being beholden to God, why then do you come at all to his door? If you cannot, why then do you not wait more patiently for his pleasure? Should he wrong thee, it is

Digitized by Google

beat thee from his door? Why then art thou no more thankful for his leave to wait there, though thou be not presently served? Secondly, Consider who he is thou prayest to: is he not the great and glorious Majesty of heaven and earth? And is not this a part of the obedience he expects at the hands of his poor creatures? How long did Mordecai sit at the king's gate before he had what he waited for? Is it not time enough for the servant to be set at dinner, after he hath waited at his master's table? Were it not unsufferable in the servant to complain that his master sat too long, and required too much waiting at his hands? This is the language of our hearts, when we are dissatisfied at staying God's time for a mercy. Is he not a righteous, holy God? Surely he doth thee no wrong to make thee pray long for a mercy thou deservest not when it comes. Is he not wiser than thee, to know how to time his mercies? 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of its place?' Job xviii. 4. Wilt thou have God overthrow the course of his providence, to gratify thy impatient spirit? Surely this is to charge God foolishly with some error in his government. In a word, is he not a faithful God, though he comes not so soon to thy relief as thou wouldst have him? Where did he give thee leave to date his promises, and set the day of payment? No, he hath promised to answer his children's prayers, but he has concealed the time for the performance of his promise, on purpose to keep them in a waiting posture; and therefore he breaks not his promise when he detains a mercy, but thou forgettest thy duty not to wait. God is not unfaithful, but thou art faithless and unbelieving. Thirdly, Have not as good as thyself prayed as long as thou hast, before they have received an answer; and yet have not thus behaved themselves? Look into the generation of seekers, and thou wilt find that God hath exercised their patience as well as thine. Hast thou stood at God's door longer than many of thy brethren? Remember Job, David, and Heman, how many troubles came over their heads! Dismal afflictions did they endure before the day broke, and divine providence cleared up? Shall God raise a causeway for thee to walk by thyself dry-shod, while these, and thousands besides, have taken many a weary step through the deep sloughs of affliction, before they came to a fair way? When God led Israel about, and made it a journey of forty years from Egypt to Canaan, it had been great presumption for any one among them to have desired God to lead him a shorter way thither than all his brethren. David desired no more at God's hands, than to fare as his fellow-saints; 'Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name,' Psa. cxix. 132. Doth not Christ himself wait, and that long, even in heaven itself, for an answer to his prayers? He hath been already above a thousand years there at prayer for his church, and against his enemies, and hath not as yet received the full of his desires; but still is expecting, till the one be saved, and the other made his footstool. Who art thou that thou shouldst have so high an opinion of thyself, as to expect God should make all stay, and trade for time, whilst thou alone for ready money? Fourthly, Consider whether thou didst never make God wait on thee before his suit could be heard, though he begged not for his benefit, but thy own. Did God wait in thy carnal state upon thee, that he might at last be gracious to thee, and thinkest thou much of waiting now on him?

Thirdly, Not persevering in prayer, proceeds often from unbelief. The creature prays, and God is silent. Now, thinks Satan, is my time come to do this person a mischief; and therefore he labours to persuade the creature, that there is no mercy to be expected from God. If, saith the tempter, God had meant to come, he would have been here before, therefore give over, and take some other course. Thus he dealt with our Saviour; no enemy appeared in the field for forty days, and then he appears. This is his way with the saints also; he lets them alone until he thinks they are softened into a compliance by long standing upon duty, then he comes to parley with them, and takes them off from waiting upon God, by starting many fears and doubts in their thoughts concerning his power, mercy, and truth; so that the Christian is put to a stand, and knows not whether he should pray or not; or if he does, yet his heart is not in it; he prays faintly, with a kind of despair, as the poor widow that made ready her last handful of meal with no other thoughts than of dying when she had eaten it. Unbelief is a soul-enfeebling sin; it is to prayer, as the moth is to the

Digitized by Google

cloth; it wastes the soul's strength, so that it cannot look up to God with any hope; 'They made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened,' Neh. vi. 9. Resist, therefore, Satan; be steadfast in the faith; never let thy heart suffer the power, mercy, or truth of God to be called into question; thou hadst as good question whether he can cease to be God. These attributes of the Divine nature are to thy faith, like the stone to Moses, which Aaron and Hur put for him to sit upon; they will sustain thy spirit, that thou shalt not faint, or grow weary at the work, though God makes thee wait till the going down of the sun. O, this waiting posture highly pleaseth God, and never puts the soul to shame! Mary, that stayed by the sepulchre, though she missed her Lord there, got at last a happy sight of him. Let us but seek Christ in faith, and he will at last be with us, though we do not presently see him.

Fourthly, Some persevere not in prayer, because they have their eye upon some other than God, from whom they expect help; it is no wonder such give over praying. While the carnal heart prays for deliverance, he hath other projects in his head how to disentangle himself out of the briers in which he is caught; on these he lays more stress than on God; therefore at last he leaves praying, to betake himself to them: whereas another that looks for all from God, and sees no way to help himself, but by calling in God to his aid, will say, as Peter to Christ, 'Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' I know not another door to knock at but thine; I will therefore never leave thee: 'We know not what to do,' said good Jehoshaphat, 'but our eyes are unto thee.'

Fifthly, It proceeds from a want of inward complacency which the creature should have in God, and communion with him. 'Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?' Job xxvii. 10. He will not always call upon him, because he never did cordially delight in him. We easily let go what we take no great content to enjoy. The sincere soul is tied to God by the heartstrings; his communion is founded in love; and love is stronger than death, many waters cannot quench it. A stranger may have an errand that brings him to a man's house, but that done, his acquaintance ceaseth; but a friend comes to sit with him, and the delight he takes in his company will not suffer him to discontinue his acquaintance long. If, therefore, thy affections be but once placed upon God as thy chief good, thou wilt always be anxious to visit him in prayer. The hypocrite useth prayer, as we use physic, not because he loves the taste of it: the sincere soul useth it as food, it is sweet to his palate. David, from the inward satisfaction he found in the presence of God, cries out, Psalm lxxiii. 28, 'It is good for me to draw near to God:' never will such a soul part with it; no, he will say, as the fig-tree in Jotham's parable, Shall I forsake my sweetness, and the good fruit that I have found in communion with my God? I will never do it.

EPHESIANS vi. 18.

And supplication for all saints.

THESE words contain the sixth and last branch in the apostle's directory for prayer; and that is, the comprehensiveness of the duty, or, the persons who are to be the subject of our prayers,—'Supplication for all saints.'

But what! Would he have us pray for none but the saints? This cannot be his meaning, being so contrary to the mind of Christ, from whom he hath his message. Christ both bids us pray for our enemies, and is himself our pattern for it; yea, Paul himself, 1 Tim. ii. 1, 'I exhort that prayers and supplication be made for all men;' that is, all sorts of men, faithful and infidels, friends and enemies; so then saints are not here named as the only subject of our prayers, but as a sort of persons, whom we are in an especial manner to carry in our prayers to God, whom, if we but remember, we shall not easily forget to pray for others also, because the saints' number is increased and taken out of the number of the wicked. In praying for Babylon, we pray for Jerusalem.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE PUBLIC SPIRIT THAT SHOULD BREATHE IN OUR PRAYERS FOR OTHERS.

SECTION I.—The Christian ought to have a public spirit in prayer. This is a duty of common interest, in which others are to share with ourselves; like the buckets that hang in our houses, which are for the use of any person whose house is on fire. The spirit of prayer is a public treasure, though laid up in some few hands: all cannot pray, therefore, all should be prayed for: I say, it is the saint's duty; we sin and transgress the law of prayer if we do it not; 'God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you,' 1 Sam. xii. 23. Paul writes himself a debtor to his brethren in this respect: 'We are bound to thank God always for you,' 2 Thess. i. 3. In another place, he thanks God that he hath them in remembrance always; so sensible he was of the weight of this duty, that he thanks God for giving him a heart to perform it. First, It is one end why the spirit of prayer is given us: the gifts of the Spirit are to be employed according to the mind and intent of the Donor. If a man bequeathes house and land to another, but charges his estate with such a payment, he forfeits his legacy that fulfils not the will of the dead. God intends the good of others in all his gifts to particular saints; the way to lose our gift is to hoard it up, and not lay it out for the end it was given. 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,' 1 Cor. xii. 7. How should we profit others by this gift of the Spirit, if not by praying for them? That Spirit which stirs us up to pray for ourselves, will, if we quench it not, send us on the same errand for others; yea, in some cases, for others before ourselves; for their spiritual good, before our own temporal; for the public good of a community, before the private good of our single person; as in Moses' case, who would not be taken off praying for Israel, to be made great upon their ruins; indeed, that offer from God, 'Let me alone, and I will make of thee a great nation,' was only probatory, to try whether Moses would prefer his own stake before the people's; and God was higly pleased with his self-denial. Secondly, The law of love imposes it as a duty upon us; we are commanded to love our neighbour as ourself, the word 'as' imports a parity for kind, though not for proportion; for manner, though not for measure; I must love my neighbour as truly, though not as strongly as myself. Now, how do we shew real love to ourselves, if we pray not for ourselves? Our Savour expounds our love to our enemy by praying for him, Matt. v. 44, 'Love your enemies,—and pray for them which despitefully use you.' We may give an alms to an enemy, and not love him; it is easier to draw out our purse than to draw out our soul to the hungry, as the prophet phraseth it; in prayer we draw out our souls. If a man ever speaks or does anything sincerely, surely it is when he directs his speech to God in prayer; therefore, God chooseth this prayer for our enemies, as the surest testimony of our loving them; and truly, he that wisheth well only to himself, may be well reckoned among the most degenerate of mankind; one well compares such a self-lover to the hedgehog, that confines himself within his own soft down, and turns out bristles to all besides. This shews the largeness of God's bountiful heart; he gives his children not only leave to ask for themselves, but for others; this is not the manner of men, who count it too much boldness to beg for themselves, and others also. If a poor man, when he hath got his alms, should beg for all his neighbours, where should he find the man that would bid him welcome? But behold here the immensity of Divine goodness, who gives us leave to bring our neighbour's pitcher with our own to his door; yea, commands it, and takes it ill when we steal to prayer upon our own private errand, and leave the thought of others' necessities behind us. Why shouldst thou stand in doubt, whether God will supply thy own wants, when he commands thee to intercede for others?

SECTION II.—A lamentation may be taken up for the narrowness of our spirit in prayer. Some, indeed, are so far from praying for others, that they have not learned to shew so much mercy to themselves; yea, live in such a state of alienation from God, wherein they cannot pray for themselves, or their dearest relations. O, how many prayerless fathers have we that are cruel to their own flesh! Husbands to the wives of their own bosom! Ask whether they love them, they will tell you, yes, as their own souls; and you may believe them

Digitized by Google

for they serve them no worse than their own souls. A time is coming, wherein they shall know, that one hearty prayer found upon the file for their relations, would speak more for the love they pretended toward them, than all the bags of money which they fill for them. Others, if they shew a little natural affection to their own flesh and domestic relations, yet their love hath much ado to get over their own thresholds. O, how little do they feel their neighbours' pains! How seldom do they spread them with any real sense upon their hearts before the Lord! Or, if their eye affects their heart with what is presented so near to them in the afflictions of their next-door neighbour, yet how few discover such a public spirit, as to carry upon their hearts the miseries of those that are at a farther distance! Paul was affected with, yea, had a great conflict for those that had never seen his face in the flesh. O, what a decay is there of this public spirit! There is great complaint among men, of their great losses in our late times of confusion; but I think the saints are the greatest losers, who have lost so much of their love and charity. One saith that the world was once destroyed with water, because the heat of lust had set it on fire; and that it shall be once again destroyed with fire, because of the coldness of love and charity. Love is to the soul, what natural heat is to the body, it gives vigour, and enables it to perform all the offices of life; but, alas! how is this decayed among Christians! This was long ago foretold by our Saviour, Matt. xxiv. 12, 'The love of many shall wax cold;' and no wonder, when self-love waxeth so hot. It was foretold also by the apostle, 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2, 'In the last days—men shall be lovers of their own selves;' and what a black regiment follows this captain, sin! If once a man makes self the whole of his aim, farewell loving of, or praying for others: charity cannot dwell in so narrow a house as the self-lover's heart; yea, it is diametrically opposed to it,—'Love seeketh not her own,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5. But to turn lamentation into exhortation, labour for a public spirit in prayer. Is there none, O man, that needs the mercy of God besides thyself? Wouldst thou have none saved in another world, nor provided for in this, with thee? Now, in remembering others, God gives thee leave thy love should begin at home; look into thy family; canst thou forget them a day, if thou rememberest thyself? Shall a believer turn worse than an infidel? He provides for his house; but thou hast light which tells thee, that all thy providing for them is nothing, except God say, Amen. When thou hast paid thy duty to them, still widen thy charity; consider what is doing in the neighbourhood: how many mayest thou there find, pouring out their precious souls a drink-offering to Satan, in their horrid abominations! O, pray that God would stay their bloody hand, before they have irrecoverably made away with themselves. Then take a farther walk in thy meditations to view the public state of the nation: see what mercies are written with the golden pen of Providence upon its forehead, and pay thy humble thanks; observe what prognostics of judgments there are, and get into the gap before the wrath begins. Did Abraham so plead for Sodom, though himself was far enough from the danger of the storm; and not thou for thy own nation, who art likely to be taken in it, if it falls in thy days, if the cloud impending be not scattered by the prayers of the faithful? Nay, let not the sea that divides thee and the other parts of the earth make thee think thou art not concerned in their happiness or misery. Let thy prayers walk over the vast ocean, and bring matter for thy devotions. Visit the churches of Christ abroad, yea, the poor Indians, and other ruins of mankind, that lie where Adam's sin threw them with us, and carry their deplorable condition before the Lord.

SECTION III.—Take a few quickening considerations to set thee more feelingly to this work. First, Thou canst not pray in faith for thyself if only for thyself. The Lord Jesus taught his disciples this in the form of prayer which he gave them; 'When ye pray, say, Our Father;' 'Father,' is a word of faith and confidence: 'Our Father,' imports love and charity; two necessary graces in prayer. We live by faith, and faith works by love; no prayer can be without faith, nor faith without charity. Christ sends him in the gospel from the altar, to reconcile himself to his brother, before he offered his gift, and why; but that he might be as ready and willing to pray for his brother as for himself? If we have no charity to pray for our brother, we cannot expect welcome when we pray for ourselves. Secondly, You do not else make good the character which God gives of his children; he speaks of them as being a blessing to the person-

Digitized by Google

and places round about them; 'Israel shall be a blessing in the land of Assyria,' Isa. xix. 24. They are compared to a fountain, which is a common benefit. Now, one way wherein the godly are eminently serviceable to others, is, by the interest they have in God, and the prevalency of their prayers with him: 'By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted,' Prov. xi. 11; that is, by their fervent prayers, which draw down a blessing from heaven upon it. God blesseth by command; he 'commanded the blessing, even life for evermore,' Psalm cxxxiii. 3. The saints bless when they pray, Numb. vi. 23, 24, 'On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee.' Thirdly, God gives a signal testimony of his favour to his saints' prayers for others. 1. He doth great things, at their request, for others. How often did Moses reverse divine plagues that were executed on Egypt! even as often as Pharaoh had a heart to beg his prayers. How long did Abraham beat the market for Sodom's preservation! He brought it down to ten righteous men; could that wicked place have but afforded that number, it had not been turned to ashes. 2. When their prayers obtain not a mercy for a people, nothing else can help them: therefore God, to express his peremptory resolution, and irreversible decree to punish Israel, tells them, 'Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people,' Jer. xv. 1; thereby intimating their case desperate. If the prayers of such holy men could not prevent the fall of his wrath impending, much less should they with their own power and policy shift it off. Indeed, when God is fully set upon a vindictive way, he takes them off from praying: Jer. vii. 16, 'Pray not thou for this people,—for I will not hear thee;' and even in this he shows at what rate he values his people's prayers, which makes him loth they should bestow their pains in vain. 'Pray not thou for this people:' as if he had said, Let them pray if they will; I can, without any regret, reject their prayers; but I am unwilling thou shouldst pray in an unaccepted time, for that which I have no mind to give. 3. When the saints' prayers bring not back with them the mercy for others, yet God is careful that his people should not have the least suspicion that the denial proceeds from any disrespect he hath to their persons; therefore sometimes he gives the thing they desire, only changes the subject; thus, what God denied Abraham for Ishmael, he gave him abundantly in Isaac; sometimes, again, what he denies for others, he grants to themselves; thus David's prayer for his enemies returned into his own bosom.

SECTION IV.—Now, in praying for others, First, May thy heart be deeply affected with their state and condition. God loves mercy better than sacrifice: to draw out our souls in giving an alms, is greater charity than to draw out our purse: so in prayer, be sure thy soul be poured out, or else thou art a deceiver, thou wrongest both God and him thou prayest for. Before Christ prayed for Lazarus, he was troubled: 'Behold how he loved him,' said those about him, who were witness to his groans and tears. Then thou wilt pray fervently for others, when thy heart is warmed into sympathy with them. Secondly, Prefer spiritual blessings in thy prayers for others, before temporal. Is it a sick friend? If health be all thou beggest for him, thou art not faithful to him: he may have that, and be the worse for it; ask a Christ, grace, and glory for him; then thou dost something to purpose. Surely this our Saviour meant in his method of curing the man sick of the palsy, Matt. ix. 2, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee.' He first brings him the news of a pardon as a mercy infinitely of more worth than life or limbs, thereby tacitly reproving his friends, who took more care to have his body healed, than his soul saved. Is it the nation? Aim at more than deliverance from outward judgments. The carnal Jews could say, 'Give us water, that we may drink,' Exod. xvii. 2: but thought not of their sin, to beg repentance for, and pardon of it: that was the cry of the creature; but this is the voice of a saint. Thirdly, Be not discouraged in your prayers for others, though an answer doth not presently overtake them. Thou prayest for a rebellious child, or carnal friend, who yet continue to be so; take heed thou dost not presently think them past grace, and give over the work. Samuel saw the people he prayed for mend but slowly, yet hear what he saith, 1 Sam. xii. 23, 'God forbid I should cease praying for you.' I have heard of some that have been laid forth, yea, buried, before they were dead, by their over-hasty friends. Be not thou thus cruel to the souls of thy

Digitized by Google

relations or neighbours: lay them not out of thy prayers, bury them not in thy thoughts for reprobates, because thou canst not perceive any sign of spiritual life in them, though thou hast many a time stretched thy hands in prayer over them; their souls are yet in their bodies, and it is not too much for God to breathe the life of grace in their souls. Is it for the public? Draw not in thy stock of prayer, though thou hast not so quick a return in thy trade with heaven for it as thou desirest. The father's labour is not lost, if his son receives the benefit: he, may be, dies before the ship comes home which he sent forth, but his child lives to have the gains of that enterprise. Thus one generation sows prayers for the church, and another reaps the mercy prayed for.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN PRAYING FOR OTHERS, WE SHOULD PRINCIPALLY PRAY FOR SAINTS.

In praying for others, we are, in an especial manner, to remember the saints. The apostle hints this, by making them as the chief rank of men for whom we are to pray: and it suits well with Gal. vi. 10, 'As we have opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.' Now, I take prayer to be one of the most eminent ways of doing them good. What greater kindness can a man do for his sick friend, then to go to the physician for him? By other acts of charity, we give a little out of our own purse, but by praying for the poor saints, we open God's treasure for them. If one should meet a beggar, and throw him a few pence, but another tells him, I have no money of my own to give, yet I will go to court, and open your necessitous condition to the king; it were easy to tell which of these does the poor man the greatest kindness: a poor saint may thus do more for another, though he hath neither silver nor gold to give, than he who hath the largest purse of his own. The conduct of Araunah is observable, 2 Sam. xxiv. 22, where we have his bountiful offer to king David,—'Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him; here be oxen for burnt sacrifice.' This was much, and showed his heart to be noble and large, as it follows, verse 23, 'All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king;' yet one thing he did which amounted to more than all this, and that was his hearty prayer to God for David's acceptance; and 'Araunah said unto The king, the Lord thy God accept thee.' He might have done all the other for fear; for a subject sometimes gives to his prince, because he knows he may take, though he gives it not; but by his praying for him, he discovered his hearty affection to him.

Section I.—There are several weighty reasons for this duty. First, From God. They are the special object of his love; his heart is set upon them, his thoughts and providence are at work continually for them. Others partake of the Divine bounty, but they may thank the saints for it. When once God hath got his whole family of saints home to himself in heaven, it will be quickly seen what God will do with the rest of the world. God dispenseth the same providence to them both, but not with the same affection, nor the same end: 'He is the Saviour of all, but especially of those that believe.' He saves the saints with saving purposes; the wicked he saves temporally, to destroy them eternally; he saves them from a present sickness or danger, that they may ripen for hell, as we save our young wood for greater growth, and then cut it down for the fire. Now, what shall be done for those to whom God declares so much love? We cannot do less than pray for them; by this we comply with God's command, and shew our content in his choice. God hath made them the proper heirs of all his promises. Now promises are the ground of prayer: we are to pray for others, though wicked, not knowing but God may have a secret purpose of doing them good; but where there is grace, God breaks open his decree. The fountain of his electing grace, which ran hitherto underground, now bursts forth, so that you may with confidence pray for such an one. When Paul begs prayers, to encourage his friends at the work for him, he assures them of his sincerity,—'Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly,' Heb. xiii. 18. As if he had said, You pray for one that God will not chide you for mentioning. They are the only generation that honour God in the world; indeed, God honours himself upon others in their present lusts and future damnation: he makes their wrath praise

Digitized by Google

him here, and his wrath poured on them shall praise him hereafter; but no thanks to them, for they do their utmost to lay the honour of God in the dirt: but the saints are a people, who are not merely passive, but active in the praising of God, it is their mother-language to bless the name of God; whatever is their work, this is their end and aim: whether they eat or drink, they do all to the glory of God. Now, upon this account we are to pray for saints above others. The first thing our Saviour teacheth us to pray for is, that the name of God be hallowed, in order to which he directs us, in the very next words, to pray for his saints, as those who alone can hallow it,—'Thy kingdom come.'

SECTION II.—Secondly, From Satan. His great spite is against the saints. God owns them, therefore he hates them. Where God is on one side, you may be sure to find the devil on the other. Indeed they are the only company that stand in his way. As for the wicked, he considers himself to be advanced when they are exalted in the world: the father is honoured when the child is preferred; but the saints' rising portends his fall: this makes him bend all his force by temptation or persecution to procure their ruin: these are the stars he would stamp under his feet. The first murder in the world was of a saint, and Cain will kill Abel to the end of the world; therefore they need our prayers most.

Thirdly, From the saints prayed for. First, They exceedingly desire prayers: the wicked may do this also, but it is by fits, in a pang of fear or fright. Pharaoh sends in all haste for Moses, when the plagues of God are in his house and fields. The carnal Jews beg Samuel to pray for them, that they die not; but it was when terrified with dreadful thunder, 1 Sam. xii. 19: yea, Simon Magus himself, smitten with horror at Peter's words, begs his prayers, that none of those things which he had spoken might come upon him. But at another time these wretches cared neither for the saints nor for their prayers. Pharaoh who desired Moses at one time to pray for him, at another time drives him out of his presence, with a charge never to come to him more; but the saints are ambitious of the prayers of their brethren, and not the meanest among them neither; indeed, as any one is more eminent in grace, so he is more greedy of his brethren's help. Paul himself, Rom. xv. 30, is not ashamed to beg this boon of the meanest saint,—'Now, I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.' Did you ever hear a beggar at your door beg more passionately? 'For the Lord Jesus' sake and for the Spirit's sake.' If ever you felt any warmth in your hearts from the blood of Christ, or love of the Spirit comforting you, wrestle with me, till we together have got the victory. Secondly, As the saints are covetous of prayers, so they take comfort beforehand, from the expectation of what they shall receive by them. 'I know this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer,' Phil. i. 19. 'I trust that through your prayers I shall be given to you,' Phil. ii. 28. Where, First, Observe Paul's modesty; he sinks and drowns his own prayers, and expresseth his faith on theirs. Secondly, His confidence: he doubts not but they will pray, neither does he question the happy return of their prayers into his bosom: as if he had said, If ye be faithful, ye will pray for me. So that we break our trust, and disappoint our brethren, if we forget them. Thirdly, Saints are the honestest debtors we can deal with, they will pay you in your own coin. He that shews any kindness to a saint, is sure to have God for his paymaster; for it is their way to turn over their debts to God, and engage him to discharge their score to man. Onesiphorus had been a kind friend to Paul, and what does Paul for him? To prayer he goes, and desires God to pay his debts. 'The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.'

SECTION III.—Fourthly, From the saint's praying. There is no duty God commands, but he pays the Christian well for the performance. There is enough in this duty that may make it lovely and desirable in our eye: the best of saints have counted it a great privilege to be admitted into this noble order. Paul thanks God that, without ceasing, he had Timothy in remembrance day and night in his prayer. But wherein lies this mercy to have a heart to pray for our brethren? First, it is a singular mercy to be instrumental to the grace or comfort of any saint, much more for the glorifying of God: this a gracious

Digitized by Google

heart prizeth highly, though it costs him dear to promote it. Now, in praying but for one single saint, thou dost both, 2 Cor. i. 11: 'Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.' Paul begging prayers enforceth his request with a double argument. First, From the prevalency of joint-prayers. When twenty pull at a rope, the strength of every one is influential to the drawing of it; so in prayer, where many concur, all help. God looks at every one's faith and fervency exerted in the duty, and directs the answer to all. Secondly, From the harmony of joint-praises. The fuller the concert in praises, the sweeter the music in God's ear: joint-prayers produce social praises. He that concurs to a prayer, and not in returning praise, is like one that helps his friend into debt, but takes no care to help him out. Secondly, By praying for others, we increase our own joy. When Paul saw the prayers which he had sown for the Thessalonian saints come up in their faith and zeal, he is transported with joy, as an incomparable mercy bestowed upon himself: 'What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God?' 1 Thess. iii. 9. He had watered them with his prayers: God gives him joy for their grace: his joy flourisheth, and his heart is so ravished, that he knows not what thanks to God are enough for the mercy he receives through their hands. Truly, the reason why we gain no more from the graces of our brethren is, because we venture no more prayers upon them. Thirdly, This would be an undoubted evidence to prove ourselves saints, could we but heartily pray for them that are such. Love to the brethren is often given as a character of a true saint. Now, there is no act whereby we express our love to saints, which stands more clear from insincerity than this of praying for them. Will you say you love the saints, because you frequent their company, shew kindness to their persons, stand up in their defence against those that reproach them, or because you can suffer with them? All this is excellent, if sincere; yet how easy is it for vain-glory, or some other carnal end, to mingle with these! But if thou canst find thy heart in secret, where none of these temptations have such an advantage to corrupt thee, pray to God for them with a deep sense and feeling for their sins, wants, and sorrows; this will speak more for the sincerity of thy love than all the former without this.

CHAPTER XX.

THE APPLICATION OF THE POINT.

Must we pray above all for saints? Woe then to those who, instead of praying for them, had rather 'make a prey of them,' Isa. lix. 15; who, instead of praying for them, can curse them, perhaps not under the plain name of saints, but as *fanatics*, *puritans*, or some other name of scorn, invented to cover their malice, so they can devour and tear them in pieces. The saints are a sort of people that none love, but those that are themselves such. The righteous are an abomination to the wicked: it is a sect 'everywhere spoken against.' The feud began at the first between Abel and Cain, and so spread over the whole world: one generation takes up the cudgels against them as another lays them down. Hamilcar bequeathed his hatred against the Romans to his son Hannibal; so is the feud transmitted by the wicked from one generation to another against the saints: nothing can quench their wrath: let the saint be ever so wise, meek, affable, and bountiful, yet this, that he is a Christian, is enough to blot all in the wicked world's thoughts; no near relation can wear off their spite; Michal cannot repress her scornful spirit, but jeers her husband to his face for his zeal before the Lord. In a word, no benefit which accrues to the wicked by the saints can make them lay down their hatred: they are the cause of blessings to the families, towns, and kingdoms they live in, and yet the butt at which their envenomed arrows are levelled. The whole city is against Lot, so true and constant are the wicked to their own side. Tertullian tells us of some heathen husbands that liked their wives, though loose and wanton, and lived with them (when such) before they were converted to Christianity; but when once they had embraced the faith, and thereby were made chaste, they put them away: fathers, that could bear undutiful, rebellious children, when once converted, turned them out of

Digitized by Google

doors: as any were reformed in their lives by turning Christians, so they became offenders. It were well if this were only the heathen's sin, but by woful experience we find that the true Christian hath not more cruel enemies in the whole world than some of his own name. The sharpest persecutions of the church have been by those that were in the church. O what a dreadful account will such have to make in the great day, who profess the name of Christ, yet hate his nature in the saints! who call Christ Lord, yet persecute his best, and destroy his most loyal subjects! These are the men who above all others shall feel the utmost of the Lord's fiery wrath in the day when he shall plead his people's cause, and avenge himself on their adversaries. Be exhorted to this duty of praying for saints; you cannot do anything which God will take more kindly at your hands. He himself puts this petition into our mouths,—'Ask me of things to come concerning my sons,' Isa. xlv. 11. Joab knew what he did in sending the woman of Tekoa to David, with a petition wrapped up in a handsome parable, for Absalom, the king's son; he knew the king's heart went strongly after him, and so the motion could not but be acceptable: and is not the Lord's heart gone after his saints? Thy prayer for them therefore must needs come in good time, when it shall find the heart of God set upon the very thing thou askest; this was it that God was so pleased with in Daniel, chap. ix. 22, 23. Now, in your prayers for the saints, among other things: First, Pray for their lives; they are such a blessing where they live, that they seldom fall, but the earth shakes under them; it is commonly a prognostic of an approaching evil, when God takes them away by death. Jeroboam had but one son in whom some good was found: he died, and then the ruin of his father's family followed, 1 Kings xiv. 13. When Augustine died, then Hyppo falls into the enemies' hands; if the wise man be gone that preserved the city, no wonder if its end hastens. God makes way to let his judgments in upon the world, by taking the saints out of it: when God chambers his children in the grave, a storm is at hand, Isa. xxvi. It is of concern to do our utmost to keep them among us, especially when their number is so few, that we may say, as once the prophet concerning Israel, 'We are as when they have gathered the summer fruits, or the grape-gleanings of the vintage,' Micah vii. 1. Did we, indeed, see them come up as thick in our young ones, as they fall in the old, we might say, a blessing is in them; these would be as hope-seeds at least for the next generation; but when a wide breach is made, and few to step into it, this is ominous. At Moses's death, Joshua stood up in his place, and it went well with Israel; but when Joshua died, and a generation rose up that had not seen the wonders God had done for his people, then went they to wreck apace, Judges ii. 9, 10. Secondly, Pray for their liberty and tranquillity. 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee,' Psa. cxxii. 6. Jerusalem was the place for their public worship; thither the tribes went up unto the testimony of Israel, and to give thanks unto the name of the Lord, ver. 4; so that by praying for Jerusalem's peace, is meant, such serene times wherein the people of God might enjoy his pure worship without disturbance. The church hath always had her vicissitudes; but her winter commonly is longer than her summer; yea, at the same time that the sun of peace brings day to one part of it, another is wrapped up in a night of persecution. Universal peace over all the churches is a great rarity; and where it is in any part of it enjoyed, some unkind cloud or other soon interposeth; the church's peace therefore is set out by an half-hour's silence, Rev. viii. 1. When God gave the poor Jews a reviving after a tedious captivity, by moving Cyrus to grant them liberty to go and rebuild the house of God, how soon did a storm rise, and beat them from their work. One prince furthers them, another obstructs them. The gospel church, Acts ix., had a sweet breathing time of peace; but how long did it last? This short calm went before a sudden hurricane of persecution that fell upon them, chap. xii.; thus have the politic rulers of the world used the saints, as their carnal interest seemed to require; one while countenancing, another while suppressing them: there is no sort of people on earth can expect less favour from the world, than the church; their only safety therefore lies to engage God to espouse their cause. Thirdly, Pray for love and unity among themselves. The persecutor's sword is not at the church's throat among us; but are not Christians falling out amongst themselves. The question hath often been asked

Digitized by Google

why the word preached hath been no more effectual to convert the wicked, or to edify the saints: I believe one of the chief causes is the divisions amongst those that have made the greatest profession of the truth. 1. For the saints; it is no wonder they should thrive no more under the word; for the body of Christ is edified in love, Eph. iv. 12. The apostles themselves, when wrangling, got little good by Christ's sermon, or the sacrament itself, administered by Christ unto them. One would have thought that was such a meal, in the strength whereof (as so many Elijahs) they might have gone a long journey; but, alas! we see how weak they rise from it: one denies his Master, and the rest in alarm forsake him; so unfit were they in such a temper to make a spiritual advantage of the best of means. Again, pray for the wicked. It is no wonder that the word prevails no more on them; the divisions that have arisen among those that call themselves saints, have filled their hearts with prejudice against the holy truths and ways of God: Christ prays for his people's unity,—'That the world may believe that thou hast sent me,' John xvii. 21. What is oftener in the mouths of many profane wretches than this,—We will believe them when they are all of one mind, and come over to them when they can agree among themselves; who loves to put his head into a house on fire. This should stir up all that wish well to the gospel, to pray for the re-union of their divided hearts; hot disputes will not do it; prayer will, or nothing can. The God of peace can only set us at peace: if ever we are wise to agree, we must obtain our wisdom from above; this alone is pure and peaceable.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHEWS THAT ALL SAINTS ARE THE SUBJECT OF OUR PRAYERS.

In praying for saints, you must pray for all: I do not mean as the Papist, for quick and dead; prayer is a means to wait upon them in their way; at death, when they are at their journey's end, prayers are useless, and the wicked in that estate are beneath, the saint above, our prayers; we cannot help the wicked, the tree is fallen, and so it must lie. We read of a change the body shall have after death. Vile bodies may, but filthy souls cannot after death be made glorious; if they leave the body filthy, so they shall meet it at the resurrection. The time to pray for them is now, while they live among you, or never; for death and hell come together to the sinner. No sooner Dives's wretched soul is forced out of his body, but you hear it shriek in hell, Luke xvi. 22, 'The rich man died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment:' but Abraham tells him, there is a gulf fixed which forbids all intercourse between heaven and him. Now, what is that, but an irrecoverable decree with which the wicked are sealed under everlasting wrath. If God receive no prayers from them, then not from others for them: and as the wicked are beyond our help, so the saints above all need of our help. Prayer implies want, but saints departed are perfect, called therefore 'the spirits of just men made perfect;' we need not beg a pardon for them, for the Lord acquits them, they art 'just;'—not for a supply of any good they want, they are 'made perfect;'—not to remove any pain they feel, for the Spirit saith, 'Blessed are they that die in the Lord, they rest from their labours.' But they who invented this device, intended it as gain to their own purse, rather than benefit to souls; it is a doctrine contrived to bring grist to the pope's mill. But to leave this; they are living saints, your companions here in tribulation, that are the subject of your prayers. The Papists speak much of a treasury the church hath; this, indeed, is the true treasury of the church, the common stock of prayers with which they all trade to heaven for one another. Paul tells us what a large heart he had, even for those whose face he never saw in the flesh, Col. i. 2. First, We are to love all saints, therefore to pray for all. Love in a saint is the picture of God's love to us; and God's love is not partial to one saint more than another: that image is not of God's drawing, which is not like himself; nature may err in its productions, but not God in the grace which he begets in his saint. The new creature never wants its true nature; if God loves all his children, then wilt thou all thy brethren, or not one of them. When Paul commends Christians for this grace of love, he doth it thus, Eph. i. 15, 'After I heard of your faith in the Lord

Digitized by Google

Jesus, and love unto all the saints:' so Col. i. 4; Philemon 5. Now, if we love all, we cannot but pray for all; to say we love one, and not pray for him, is a solecism. Can a courtier love his friend, and not speak to his prince for him, when he may do him a favour by it? Love prompts a man to do that wherein he may express the greatest kindness to his friend. Mary poured the most precious ointment she had upon Christ. Prayer is the most precious ointment thou canst bestow on the saints; save it not for some few of them that are of thy private society, or particular acquaintance, but let the sweet odour of it fill the whole house of the church: pray for all. Secondly, We are to pray for all saints, because Christ prays for all; he carries all their names on his breastplate; 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word:' he leaves not one of the number out; the elder brother was priest to the whole family, so is Christ, our elder Brother, to the whole household of believers. Now Christ's intercession is a pattern for our prayers. We cannot, indeed, pray for all, as he doth: he prays for them not only collectively, but every individual saint by name: 'I have prayed' (Peter) 'for thee; yea, not only for every person by name, but for their particular wants and occasions: 'I have prayed that thy faith fail not.' Christ takes notice of that very grace which was in most imminent danger, and secures it by his intercession. O what unspeakable comfort is this to a saint, that he in particular should be spoken of in heaven, and every want of temptation he laboureth under be taken notice of, and provided for by Christ's mediation! Thus, indeed we cannot pray for all, because we know but few of their persons, and little of the state of those we know; neither is there need we should. Our general suffrage is as kindly taken as if we could descend to particulars. God knows the mind of the Spirit in our prayers on earth to be for the same things which Christ insisteth on in his intercession in heaven. Thirdly, We must pray for all saints, or we can pray for none. 1. He that prays for one saint, and desires not good to another, prays not for that one as a saint, but under some other consideration, as wife, friend, child, &c. 2. We cannot pray acceptably for one, expect we pray for all; and so we wrong those for whom we pray by leaving them out for whom we also should. Joseph would not hear the patriarchs concerning Simeon's release till they brought Benjamin over to him also: if thou wouldst be welcome to God in praying for any, carry all thy brethren to him in thy devotions. 'Are here all thy children?' said Samuel to Jesse. He would not sit down till the stripling David was fetched to complete the company. May be thou art earnest in prayer for thy near neigbouring Christians, but forget others that are farther off. Thou rememberest the church of God at home, but dost thou lay the miseries of the churches abroad to heart? What if God should ask thee, 'Are here all thy brethren?' Have not I children, and you brethren elsewhere in the world to be thought upon? The Jews in Babylon were not to forget Jerusalem because of the distance: 'Remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind,' Jer. li. 50.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE APPLICATION OF THE POINT.

First, What a rich merchant is the saint, who hath a stock going in so many hands! In heaven Christ is hard at prayer for him; on earth, his brethren; what can he want? Christ hath such interest in his Father's heart, that he can deny him nothing; the saints such interest in Christ's that he will not deny them; so the Christian's trade goes smoothly on in both worlds. Think of this, Christian, for thy comfort,—wherever a child of God is living upon earth, there hast thou a factor to traffic with heaven for thy good: let this help thy faith in putting up thy own private prayers, knowing that thou prayest in a communion and fellowship with others: even when thou art alone in thy closet, expect an answer to more than thine own prayer. It is uncharitableness not to pray for others, and pride not to expect a benefit from the prayers of others. Secondly, It teacheth us how inquisitive we should be concerning the affairs of our brethren, and state of the church, that so we may pray for them with a greater sense of their wants. Nehemiah, when he heard of some that were come out

Digitized by Google

of Judea, inquired how it fared with his brethren there; and from the sad report he heard of their afflictions, is put into a bitter passion, which he emptied with prayers and tears for them, into the bosom of God, Neh. i. 4. How could he have done this so feelingly, had he not first been acquainted with their distressed condition? We are, many of us, asking often, What news? and reading books of intelligence; but is it as Athenians, or as Christians?—to fill our heads or to affect our hearts?—to furnish us with matter to talk by the fireside with our neighbours, or of prayer to our God? Thirdly, Labour for a wide heart in prayer for all saints. God gave Solomon a large heart of knowledge and wisdom, as the sand of the sea, 1 Kings iv. 29. Behold a mercy greater than that which was granted to Solomon is here; a large heart is better than a large head,—to do good, than to know it. Nothing is more unworthy than a selfish spirit; and no selfishness is worse than that which is vented in prayer. A heathen could blame that Athenian who, in a drought, prayed for his own city, but forgot that his neighbours wanted as well as himself. Many heathens were great admirers of this virtue of charity; for instance, it was a law among the Romans, that none should come near the emperor's tent in the night, upon pain of death: now one night a certain soldier was apprehended standing near the emperor's tent with a petition to deliver unto him, who was therefore ordered to be executed; but the emperor hearing the noise from within his pavilion, called out, saying,—If it be for himself, let him die; if for another, spare his life. Being examined, it was found his petition was for two of his fellow-soldiers that were taken asleep on the watch; so both he escaped death, and they punishment Was this office of charity so pleasing to an earthly prince, as to dispense with a law for its sake? O how acceptable then to our merciful God is it to intercede for our fellow saints? But the more to provoke you to this duty: First, Praying for all saints will prove that thy love toward them is sincere. A man, in praying for himself or relations, stands not at that advantage to see the actings of pure grace, as when he prays for such as have not these carnal dependencies on him. When thou prayest for thyself in want or sickness, how knowest thou that it is any more than the natural cry of the creature? Is it for thy family? Still thy flesh hath an interest in the work, and may help to quicken thee, if it be not the chief spring to set thee going; but when thy heart beats strongly with a sense of another's misery, who hath nothing to move thee but his Christianity, and thou canst in secret plead with God for him as feelingly as if thou didst go on thy own errand, truly thou breathest a gracious spirit. Secondly, As it will speak for the truth of thy grace, so for the vigour of it. It is corruption that contracts our hearts. They were none of the best Christians of whom Paul gives this character, 'They sought their own.' As the heart advances in grace, so it grows more public-spirited: the higher a man ascends a hill, the larger will be his prospect: his eye is not confined within the compass of his own wall. The carnal spirit thinks of none but himself; whereas grace elevates the soul, and the more grace a man hath, the more it will enable him to look from himself into the condition of his brethren: such a one partakes of the nature of the heavenly bodies, which shed their influences down upon the whole world; especially this would speak grace high in its exercise if these circumstances concur with it. 1. When a person is himself swimming in the abundance of all enjoyments, and can then lay aside his own joy to weep and mourn for and with any afflicted saints, though at ever so great a distance from them: thus did Nehemiah for his brethren at Jerusalem, when himself had all the enjoyments that a prince's court could afford. It is not usual for any but those of great grace to feel the cords of the church's afflictions through a bed of down: it must be a David that can prefer Jerusalem above his chief joy. 2. On the other hand, when, in the depth of our own personal troubles, we can yet reserve a large space in our prayers for other saints, bespeaks a great measure of grace. To be able to lend auxiliary prayers to other afflicted saints, when thou art engaged deeply with private sorrows, shews a very gracious spirit. 3. When in our distresses we can entertain the tidings of any other saint's mercies with joy and thankfulness; this requires great grace. The prosperity of others too often breeds envy in them that want it; if, therefore, thou canst praise God for mercies granted to others, while the tears stand in thy eyes for thine own miseries, it is what flesh and blood never learnt thee.

Digitized by Google

We shall close this with a caution. Though we are to pray for all saints, yet some call for a more special remembrance at our hands; for instance, those that are near to us by bond of nature as well as of grace. 'A brother beloved, especially to me; but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord,' Philemon 16. It is true the bond of the Spirit is more sacred than that of the flesh; yet when that of the flesh is entwined with the other, it adds force to the affection, and argument to the duty; therefore, saith Paul, 'much more unto thee;' charity may begin, though it must not end at home. Domestic relation, society, and communion, whether civil or religious, give an enforcement to the duty; master for servant, and servant for master; minister for people, and people for minister. He that starves his family, is not likely to feast his neighbours; he that is a churl to his neighbours, is not likely to be over-kind to strangers: so he that prays not for those who by these relations stand so near to him, is a very unlikely person to abound in this duty for others. You are to pray particularly for those that are in distress: whoever you forget, remember these: this is a fit season for love. A friend for adversity is as proper as fire for a winter's day: Job's friends chose the right time to visit him, but took not the right course of improving their visit; had they spent the time in prayer for him which they did in hot disputes with him, they had profited him, and pleased God more. This is the season that the tempter is busy; this lion walks abroad in the night of affliction, hoping then to make the Christian his prey; and shall not we watch to pray for him? Again, this is the season when God answers prayers most speedily: 'In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me,' Psa. cxxxviii. 3: that is, in the day of affliction; indeed, now is the time when the Spirit of Christ will be stirring us up to pray; he that stirs thee up to pray for them, will be as careful to deliver up thy prayers, and see an answer returned. You are again to pray for such of the saints as are of public place and use: you include many here while you pray for one. You are to pray also for such as have expressly desired and engaged you to remember them at the throne of grace: among debts, those particularly promised are paid in the first place. Thou art a debtor to all thy brethren, and owest them a remembrance in thy prayers; but more especially them to whom thou hast particularly promised it: this is, as it were, a bond under thy hand, given for farther security of paying this debt to thy friend; whoever thou forgettest, remember him. Did the butler's conscience accuse him for not remembering his promise to Joseph, who had engaged him (when he was restored to court) to intercede with Pharaoh for him? 'I do remember my faults this day,' Gen. xli. 9. Much more hast thou cause to confess thy faults, who forgettest to make mention of them to the Lord, who have solemnly desired it at thy hands. Thou mayest prejudice his soul more by disappointing him of thy prayer, than his estate could suffer for want of thy money; how knewest thou that the mercy he wants is stopped, until thy prayers come to heaven for it? That other saints obtain by their prayers for us, what sometimes we do not by our own, is clear from Job xliii. 8.

EPHESIANS vi. 19, 20.

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds.

CHAPTER I.

SHEWS IT IS A DUTY TO DESIRE THE PRAYERS OF OTHERS, AND WHY.

THE apostle having laid out this duty of prayer in its full compass, taking all the saints within its circumference; he comes now to apply this general rule, and claims a share in it himself,—And for me.' When he bids them pray for all saints, he surely cannot be shut out of their prayers, who is not the least in the number. In the words, First, We find an exhortation, or Paul's request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel 'And for me.' Secondly, The matter of his request—'That utterance may be given unto me:' not that he would confine and determine them in their prayers to this request alone, but propounds it as a principal head to be insisted on by them on his behalf.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, The end why he desires this,—'That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.' Fourthly, A double argument to enforce this request; first, taken from his office,—'for which I am an ambassador,' secondly, from his present afflicted state,—'an ambassador in bonds.'

First, His request: and for me. First, We may note here, that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister, as well as to others; though, indeed, no duty is harder for the minister to press, or for the people to hear,—for him to preach with humility and wisdom, or for them to receive without prejudice.

Section I.—Secondly, It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also to desire the prayers of others for ourselves. If a Paul turns beggar, and desires the remembrance of others for him, who then needs it not? This hath been the constant practice of the saints. Sometimes they call in the help of their brethren upon special occasions, to pray with them; thus Daniel, chap. ii. 13, when required to interpret the king's dream, makes use of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions; then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to these, that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret. Daniel would not give an answer to the king, till he had an answer from God; to pray therefore he goes; no doubt he forgot not this errand in his closet; but withal he calls in help to join in social prayer with him; he sends for them to his house, where it is probable they prayed together for the mutual quickening of their affections, and strengthening of their petition; wherefore, verse 23, he acknowledgeth the mercy as an answer to their concurrent prayers: 'I thank thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast made known unto me what we desired of thee.' This justifies the saints' practice, when, in any great strait, they get others of the faithful to give a lift with them at this duty; sometimes we have them desiring their brethren's prayers for them, when they cannot conveniently have it with them: thus Esther sets the Jews in Shushan to prayer for her, chap. iv. 16; so our apostle, in many of his epistles, desires the saints to carry his name with them to the throne of grace, Rom. xv. 30; 2 Cor. i. 10, 11; Col. iv. 3; Phil. ii. 8; and not without great reason; for, First, God hath made it a debt, which one saint owes to another; and not to desire this debt to be paid, which God hath charged our brethren with, is to undervalue the mercy and goodness of our God. Should a legacy be left us by a friend, were it not a despising of his kindness, not to call upon the heir who is to pay it? Surely God accounts he doth us a kindness herein, and therefore may take it ill not to ask for it; it is not our usage to lose a debt for want of a demand, and this is none of the least we have owing us. Secondly, Many are the gracious promises that are made to such prayers of the faithful, one for another: 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them,' 1 John v. 16. But you will say, How can the prayer of one obtain forgiveness for another? I answer, No one is forgiven through the faith of another, this must be personal; but the believing, fervent prayer of one, is an excellent means to obtain the grace of repentance and faith for another, whereby he may come to be forgiven; so James v. 16: 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.' Now, in not desiring our brethren's help in this kind, we make no use of these promises: either the promise is empty and useless, or we that do not improve it are bad husbandmen. But we cannot say so of the promise, if we consider the great fruit and advantage which the saints in all ages have reaped from it. Did not Daniel get the knowledge of a great secret, as a return of his companions' prayers with him? Did not Job's friends escape a great judgment that hung over their heads, at his intercession? What a miraculous deliverance had Peter, at the prayers of a few saints gathered together on his behalf! Bring not, therefore, an evil report upon this promise, seeing such sweet clusters have been gathered from it.

Section II.—Thirdly, By neglecting to pray for one another, we are guilty of quenching the Spirit of prayer, which may be done in ourselves, and others also. First, By this we may quench it in ourselves, partly, because we neglect a duty: we are bid to confess our sins to one another; and for what end, but to have the benefit of mutual prayers? The same spirit which stirs thee up to pray for thyself, will excite thee in many cases to set others at prayer for thee; which

Digitized by Google

if thou dost not, thou overlayest his motions, and so committest a sin. Again, thou quenchest the spirit of prayer in thyself, by depriving thyself of that assistance which thou mightest receive in thy own prayers through theirs: for the Spirit conveys his quickening grace to us in the use of instruments and means: he that doth not hear the word preached, quencheth his spirit, because God useth this to enkindle the saint's grace; so he that desires not the prayers of others, quencheth the spirit of prayer in himself, because the exercise of their grace in prayer for thee may fetch down more grace to be poured in unto thee. Secondly, Thou mayest be accessary to the quenching of the Spirit in others, because thou hinderest the exercise of those graces in them, which would have been drawn forth in prayer for thee, hadst thou acquainted them with thy condition: by opening thy wants or desires to thy brethren, thou feedest the spirit of prayer in them, as they have new matter administered to work upon; by acquainting them with the merciful providences of God to thee, thou prickest a song of praise for them. How many groans and sighs should God in prayer have had from thy neighbouring saints, hadst thou not hid thy temptations and afflictions from their knowledge! What peals of joy and thankfulness would they have rung, hadst thou not concealed thy mercies from them!

Fourthly, To express the humble sense we have of our own weakness, and the need we have of others' help. Humble souls are fearful of their own strength: 'Now ye are full, ye are rich, and have reigned as kings without us,' saith Paul of the self-conceited Corinthians; the time was, you thought you had need of Paul's preaching to you, and praying for you, but now ye reign without us. O, how many are there who once could beg prayers of every Christian they met; nothing but wants and complaints could be heard from them, which made them beg help of the prayers of all; but now they have left the beggar's trade, and reign in an imaginary kingdom of their self-conceited sufficiency. Certainly, as it shews want of charity not to pray for others, so no want of pride not to desire prayers from others!

Fifthly, That we may prevent Satan's design against us. He knows very well what an advantage he hath upon the Christian, when separated from his company, wherefore he labours to hinder him of the aid of his brethren's prayers. Samson's strength lay not in a single hair, but his whole lock; the saint's safety lies in communion, not in solitude and single devotion. How many, alas! concealing their temptation from others, have found their sorrows grow upon them after all their own private endeavours against them!

Lastly, The love we owe to our brethren requires it. The saints here live where none love them but themselves; therefore, they had need make much of one another: now this of desiring their prayers, carries a threefold expression of love toward them. First, By this we acknowledge the grace of God in our brethren, or we would not employ them in such a work. What more honourable testimony can we give to another, than to own him as a child of God, one whose prayers are welcome to Heaven? We are bid to 'prefer every one his brother in honour.' Now, there is no way in which we can do this better, than by making use of their help at the throne of grace to be our remembrancers to the Lord. Secondly, By this we do our utmost to interest our brethren in the mercy we desire them to pray for, as whosoever shares in the duty, is a partner in the mercy. Thirdly, By this we confirm them in a confidence of our readiness to pray for them; what consists neighbourhood in, but a readiness to reciprocate kindness one to another? Now, who will be free with his neighbour, to take a kindness from him, that is not willing to do the like? Be ye strange to your friend, and you teach him to be so to you. Nothing endears Christians more in love, than an open heart one to another; a friend should have no cabinet in his bosom, to which he allows not his friend the key.

SECTION III.—But do we not, by desiring our fellow-saints' prayers, intrench upon Christ's mediatorial office? No; surely Christ would not command that which would be a wrong to himself; there is a great difference between our desiring Christ to pray for us and our brethren. We desire Christ to present our persons and prayers, expecting acceptation of both through his blood and intercession; but no such thing from the prayers of our brethren; we only desire them as friends to bear us company to the throne of grace, to present our prayers in communion together, expecting the welcome of both their and

Digitized by Google

our prayers, not from them, but from Christ; relying on Christ to procure the welcome both to our prayers and theirs, at our heavenly Father's hand.

But why, then, may we not desire the prayers of the deceased saints, for the same purpose that we desire the prayers of those that live yet with us? First. We have no precept or example for this in the word; and what is unbidden there, in duties of worship, is forbidden: we must not 'be wise above what is written.' Not to use the means which God hath appointed, is a great sin, which was Ahaz's case: but to invent ways or means more than God hath appointed, is worse. It is bad enough for a subject not to keep the king's laws, but far worse for him to presume to frame a law of his own.

Secondly, We have no way of expressing our thoughts to saints departed. Why should we pray to them who cannot hear what we say? O, where is the messenger to send our minds by; or the scripture that saith, they hear in heaven what we pray on earth?

Thirdly, It is the prerogative of Christ to be the only agent in heaven for his saints on earth. To which of the angels or saints did God say, Sit thou at my right hand? In the outward temple, we find the whole congregation praying, but into the holy of holies entered none but the high priest with his perfume. Every saint is a priest to offer up prayers for himself and others on earth; but Christ only as our High Priest intercedes in heaven for us. The glorious angels and saints there, no doubt, wish well to the church below; but it is Christ's office to receive the incense of his militant saints' prayers, which they send up from this outward temple below to heaven, and offer it up with all their desires to God; so that to employ any in heaven besides Christ to pray for us, is to put Christ out of office.

Section IV.—First, It reproves those into whose hearts it never yet came, to beg prayers for their own souls. Surely they are great strangers to themselves, and ignorant what a privilege they lose: as Christ said to the woman of Samaria, 'If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.' Did poor souls know who the saints are, what favourites with God, and how prevalent their prayers are with him, they would not willingly be left out of their remembrance. I never knew any, but, as soon as God began to work upon them, thought this worth desiring. It is natural for a servant or child, when master or father is displeased, if they know any that have an intrest in their favour, to entreat them to become suitors for them. When hunger and want pinch the poor, if they have any neighbour to be their friend, he shall soon hear of them; now, were the sense of their wants, or troubles, of a higher nature, would they not be as earnest to desire prayers for their souls? Well, you that fear God, and live among such, do your duty, though they have not hearts to desire it at your hand; pray over their senseless souls before the Lord. When a friend is sick, and his senses are gone, you do not stay to send for the physician till he comes to himself: you had need make more haste to God for such as these. Secondly, Those who desire prayers of God's people but hypocritically, and set others on work, but pray not for themselves, shew a certain sign of a bad heart. Thus Pharaoh often called for Moses to pray for him, but we read not that ever he made any address himself to God; whereas a gracious soul will be sure to meet him he employs at the work; 'I beseech you,' saith Paul, 'to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;' he did not slip the collar off his own neck, to put it on another's but drew together with them in it; else they that pray for thee, may pray the mercy away from thee. Thirdly, Such that desire prayers of others, but only in some great pinch. If their chariot be set fast in some deep slough of affliction, then they send in all haste for some to draw them out with their prayer; who at another time change their thoughts of the saints, their prayers, yea, and of God himself: the frogs once gone, and Moses hears no more of Pharaoh till another plague rubs up his memory. The consciences of many are soft and tender whilst steeping in affliction, but hard and stout when that is removed. Pharoah, that so often called Moses up to prayer, at last could not endure the sight of him. O, take heed of this: when once the wretch came to that pass, as to drive Moses from him, that had so often bailed him out of the hands of Divine vengeance, then he had not long to live; for he removed

Digitized by Google

the very dam, and lifted up the very sluice, to let in ruin upon himself. Fourthly, Such as desire others to pray for them, but vain-gloriously, to gain reputation for being religious. Beware of this; yet charge not all for the hypocrisy of some; neither deprive thyself of the benefit of others' prayers, out of an imaginary fear lest thou shouldst play the hypocrite therein; watch thy heart, but waive not the duty: because some have strangled themselves with their own garters, wilt thou, therefore, be afraid to wear thine? Or, because some canting beggars go about the country to shew their sores, which they desire not to have cured, wilt not thou, therefore, when wounded, go to the surgeon?

CHAPTER II.

THE DUTY OF PRAYING FOR THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

From this request of the apostle, we may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers.

Section I.—In regard of God, whose message they bring. They come about his work, and deliver his errand; not to pray for them will be interpreted that you wish not well to the business they have in hand for him; they do not only come from God, but with Christ: 'We, as workers together with him, beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain,' 2 Cor. vi. 1. Christ and the minister go into the pulpit together; a greater than a man is there; Master and servant are both at work. Again, the blessing of the minister's labour is from God; not the hand that sets the plant, or sows the seed, but God's blessing gives the increase, 1 Cor. iii. 6. When Melancthon was first converted, the light of the gospel shone with so clear and strong a beam on his own eyes, that he thought he should convert all he preached unto; he deemed it was impossible his hearers should withstand that truth, which he saw with so much evidence; but he afterwards found the contrary, which made him say, 'I see now that old Adam is too hard for young Melancthon.' God carries the key by his girdle, that alone can open hearts, and prayer is the key to open his. When Christ intended to send forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he sets them solemnly to prayer, Matt. ix. 38. Many are the promises which he hath given to the ministers of the gospel for their protection, that he will keep these stars in his right-hand, or they had been on the ground, and stamped under foot long ago. 'I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Exod. iv. 12. 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations,—and I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,' Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Wherefore are these promises, but to be shot back again in prayers to God who gave them?

Section II.—In regard of the ministers themselves. There is not a greater object of pity and prayer in the world, than the faithful ministers of Christ, if you consider, First, The importance of their work; it is temple-work, and that is weighty: which made Paul cry out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' I am doing a great work,' said Nehemiah, chap. vi. 3. But what was that to Paul's? There is no work more hazardous to miscarry in than this: it is sad enough to drop to hell from under the pulpit; to hear the gospel and yet to perish; but O how dismal to fall out of it thither for unfaithfulness in the work! The consideration of this made Paul so bestir himself: 'Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.' Secondly, It is a laborious work: 'Know them which labour among you,—and admonish you,' 1 Thess. v. 12,—those who labour in the word and doctrine, who labour to weariness. He that preaches as he should, shall find it a work, not of an hour while speaking in the pulpit, but a load that lies heavy on his shoulders all the week; a labour that spends the vitals, and consumes the oil which should feed the lamp of nature; such a labour, in a word, as makes old age and youth often meet together. The Jews took Christ to be about fifty years old, when he was little above thirty, John viii. 57, because Christ had so macerated his body with labour in preaching, fasting, and watching, that it made his very countenance appear aged. Other callings are, many of them, but as exercise to nature, they blow off the ashes from the coal, and help to discharge nature of those superfluities which oppress it. Who eats his bread more heartily, and sleeps more sweetly, than the ploughman? But the minister's work debilitates nature; like the candle, he wastes while he shines: whatever work is thought harder than other we have it borrowed to set forth

Digitized by Google

the minister's labour; they are called soldiers, watchmen, husbandmen, yea, their work is set out by the pangs of a woman in travail: some of them indeed have easier labours than others, those who find more success of their ministry than their brethren; but who can tell the throes that their souls feel, who all the time of their ministry go in travail, and bring forth dead children. Thirdly, It is an opposed work. First, By hell. The devil never liked temple-work; he that was at Joshua's right hand to resist him, is at the minister's elbow to disturb him, both in the study and in the pulpit: 'I would have come,' saith Paul, 'but Satan hindered.' Who can tell all the devices that Satan hath to take the minister off, or hinder him in his work? One while he discourageth him, so that he is ready, with Jonah, to run away from his charge; another while he is blowing him up with pride: even Paul himself hath a thorn given him in his flesh, to keep pride out of his heart: sometimes he disturbs him with passion, and leavens his zeal into sourness and unmercifulness; this the disciples were tainted with, when they called for fire to come down from heaven upon those who stood in their way. Sometimes he chills their zeal, and intimidates their spirits into cowardice and self-pity: thus Peter favoured himself when he denied his Master; and at another time, dissembled with the Jews, to obtain their favour. Secondly, It is opposed by the wicked world. 'To be a minister,' saith Luther, 'is nothing else but to drive the world's wrath and fury upon himself.' How are they loaded with reproaches! This dirt nowhere lies so thick as on the minister's coat. What odious names did the apostles themselves go under! And it were well they would only smite them with their tongues; but in all ages persecutors have thirsted most after their blood. The persecution in the Acts begins with the cutting off of James's head; seven thousand could lie better hid in Jezebel's time, than one prophet: these are the burdensome stones which every one is lifting at, though none can do it without bruising their own fingers. In every national storm almost, these are taken up to be thrown overboard as those that raised it. How many are there of an opinion, that nothing keeps them from seeing happy days, but the standing of ministers and their office! O, miserable happiness, which cannot be bought and purchased, but with the ruin of those that bring the tidings of peace and salvation! Such a happiness this would be, as the sheep had in the fable, when persuaded to have the dogs that kept the wolves off, killed; or as the passengers at sea would have, when their pilot is thrown overboard: in a word, such a happiness as the Jews had, when Christ was taken out of the way by their murderous hands; they slew him, to preserve themselves and their city from the Romans, but brought them with irreparable ruin by this very means upon their own head. Thirdly, That which adds weight to the former, is, that the men who are to bear this heavy burden, and to conflict with all these difficulties and dangers, are those who have no stronger shoulders than others, for they are men subject to the like infirmities with their brethren. Now, will not all this melt you into compassion toward them, and your compassion send you to prayer for them? Shall they stand in the face of death and danger, where Satan's bullets, and man's also, fly so thick, and you not be at the pains to raise a breast-work before them for their defence by your prayers?

SECTION III.—In regard of yourselves: love to yourselves should induce you to pray for them. First, Consider that the ministry is an office set up on purpose for your sakes. It was never intended for the exalting of a few men above their brethren, but for the service of your faith. The gift that Christ hath given to men, Ephes. iv. 12, are for the edifying of the body of Christ; and will you not pray for those that, from one end of the year to the other, are at work for you? If you had but a child or servant sent abroad about your worldly business, would you not send a prayer after him? Thus did good Jacob, when his children went on his errand to Egypt,—'God Almighty give you mercy before the man.' Will not you do this much for your minister, and pray that God Almighty may go with him, when in his study to prepare, and when in the pulpit to deliver what he hath prepared for your souls? Secondly, The minister's miscarriage is dangerous to the people; therefore pray for them, lest you be led into temptation by their falls. The sins of teachers are the teachers of sin; if the nurse be sick, the child is in danger; if the minister be tainted with an error, it is strange if many of his people should not catch the

Digitized by Google

infection; if he be loose and scandalous in his life, he is like a common well, corrupted and muddied, at which all the town draw their water. The devil aimed at more than Peter, when he desired leave to try a fall with him, Luke xxii. 31. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.' He knew his fall was likely to lead to the fall of many others. The minister's practice makes a greater sound than his doctrine. They who forget his sermon, will remember his example, to quote it for their apology, when time serves. Peter withdraws, and other Jews dissembled with him, Gal. ii. 12, 13. Truly, your ministers are but men, subject to like passions with yourselves: he among them that presumes that he shall not slide into an error, or fall into a sin, is bolder than any promise in the word gives him leave: they need your prayers as much as any, and those most that fear their danger least. Thirdly, By praying for the minister, you take the most hopeful way to profit by his ministry. Such a soul as this may come in expectation of having a portion laid on his trencher; and such guests as send to heaven before they come to an ordinance, are most likely to have the best entertainment. He that hears a sermon, and hath not prayed for the minister, and the success of his labours, sits down to his meat before he hath craved a blessing; he plays the thief to his own soul, while he robs the minister of the assistance his prayers might have brought him from heaven. The less the minister is prayed for, the less it is to be feared will the people profit. Fourthly, By praying for the minister, you not only render the word he preacheth more effectual to yourselves, but also interest yourselves in the good his ministry does to others: as there is a way of partaking in others' sins, so in others' holy services. He that strengthens the hands of a sinner any way in his wicked practices, makes his sin his own, and shall partake with him in the wages due to the work when the day of reckoning comes. So he that strengthens the minister's hand in his holy work, whether by prayer, countenance, or relief of his necessities, becomes a partaker with him in his service, and shall not be left out in the reward, Matt. x. 41. We read there of 'a prophet's reward' given to private Christians; they who communicate with the minister in his labour, by any subserviency to it, shall share in the reward. When God comes to reward his prophets for their faithful service, then Obadiah, that hid them from the fury of their persecutors; then Onesiphorus, that refreshed their bowels; yea, then all those faithful ones that put up their fervent prayers for the free course of the gospel in their ministry, shall be called in to share with them in the reward. He that hath but a fiftcenth part in a ship, is an owner as well as he that hath more; and when the voyage is over, he hath his share of the return that is made, proportionable to his part. O, what an encouragement is it to have a stock going in this ship! yea, to venture deeper than ever at the throne of grace for the now despised ministers of Christ, seeing Heaven's promise is our insurance-office to secure all we send to sea upon this account.

CHAPTER III.

SHEWS WHY THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL CHIEFLY DESIRE PRAYERS.

The second branch of the words follows, and contains the nature of the apostle's request to the church of Ephesus; or what he desires them to mention to God in his behalf,—'That utterance may be given to me.'

Section I.—Wherefore observe, First, The spirituality of his desire. He does not request them to pray for carnal things; no, we hear him not so much as mention his necessities and outward wants, which, being now a prisoner, it is likely he was no great stranger to; but they are spiritual wants he most groans under, he desires the charity of their prayers more than of their purse. Secondly, Observe the public utility of that which he begs prayers for,—'That utterance may be given to me.' This is not a personal privilege, which would redound only to his own advantage, but that which may fit him for his public employment in the church: from which we may gather that a faithful minister's heart runs more on his work than on himself: that which he chiefly desires is, how he may best discharge his ministerial trust. No doubt, Paul spake out of the abundance of his heart; as if he had said, If you will take me into your prayers, let this be your request, 'That utterance may be given me.' 'Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course,' 2 Thess. iii. 1. 'Praying

Digitized by Google

also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,' Col. iv. 3. Admirable are the expressions whereby this holy man declares how deeply his heart was engaged in the Lord, Rom. i. 9. He tells them that his very soul and spirit was set upon it; 'whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son.' Never did any desire more for preferment in the church, than he to preach the gospel in the church: 'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,' ver. 11. He professeth himself a debtor to all sorts of men; he hath a heart and tongue to preach to all that have an ear to hear. 'I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise,' ver. 14. Yea, he was ready to preach the gospel at Rome itself, ver. 15, where he should stand in the mouth of death and danger; this so took up his thoughts, that for it he threw all worldly concerns behind him: 'I seek not yours, but you,' 2 Cor. xii. 14. He had rather preach them into Christ than their money into his purse: and as for their respect and love, though it was due to him, yet he lays it aside: 'I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.' His duty he will do towards them, and leaves them to look to theirs towards him. God will reward the faithful minister, though his people will not thank him for his labour. In a word, his very life was not valued by him, when it stood in competition with his work, Acts xx. 24: 'But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus.' And not without great reason is it, that ministers should prefer their duty above all temporal respects; they are servants to God, and a servant must look to his work, whatever becomes of himself. Abraham's servant would not eat till he had done his message; and when it had succeeded, he would not stay to lose time, Gen. xxiv. 56. It is necessary the minister should fulfil his ministry; not that he should be rich, nor be in reputation. The incomparable value of souls is such, as should make us hazard our whole temporal, to promote their eternal salvation: he that wins souls is wise, though he lose his own life in the work.

Section II.—We come to a more particular inquiry into what the apostle means by 'utterance,' which he desires may be given him. A parallel place to this we have, Col. vi. 3, 4. Three things we may conceive the apostle aims at in this request. First, By 'utterance,' may be meant, liberty to preach the gospel; that his mouth might not be stopped by the persecutor: now he desires they would pray for him, that he might not be quite taken off his work. What a grievous affliction it is to a faithful minister to be denied liberty to preach the gospel! So long as Paul might preach, though in a chain, he was not much troubled; the word was free, though he was bound; but to have his mouth stopped, to see poor souls ready to perish for want of that bread which he had to give, and yet not be allowed this liberty, went to his heart. 'O pray,' saith he, 'that utterance may be given.' If he might not preach, neither would he live; for upon this account alone he desired life,—the furtherance of their faith, Phil. i. 25. O, how far are they from Paul's mind, to whom it is more tedious to preach, than grievous to be kept from the work! How seldom should we see some in the pulpit, were it not a necessary expedient to bring in their revenue at the year's end.

Section III.—The liberty of the gospel, and of the ministers to deliver it, are in an especial manner to be prayed for. First, Because this is strongly opposed by Satan and his instruments. Wherever God opens a door for his gospel, there Satan raiseth his batteries; 'A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries,' 1 Cor. xvi. 9. No sooner doth God open his shop windows, but the devil is at work to shut them again, to hinder the free trade of his gospel. Other men's servants can work peaceably in their master's shop, but as for God's servants, every one hath a stone to throw in at them, as they pass by. When Paul began to preach at Thessalonica, the city was presently in an uproar: 'These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also,' Acts xvii. 6. Indeed, what they said was true; let the gospel have but liberty, and it will turn the world upside down, it will make a change, but a happy one; this the devil knows, and therefore dreads its approach. Secondly, Because it is the choicest mercy that God can bless a nation with. Happy are the people that are in such a case; it is the gospel of the kingdom, it lifts a people

Digitized by Google

up to heaven; we could better spare the sun out of its orb, than the preaching of the gospel out of the church. Souls might find the way to heaven, though the sun did not lend them its light; but without the light of truth, they cannot take one step right toward it: work 'while ye have light,' John xii. 36. The work of salvation cannot be done by the candle-light of a natural understanding, but by the sun-light of the gospel revelation; this sun must rise, before man can go forth to this labour. Thirdly, It is in God's power to preserve the liberty of his gospel and messengers, in spite of the devil and his instruments; therefore, indeed, Paul sends them, not to court, to beg his liberty, but to heaven: God had Nero a closer prisoner than he had Paul: 'Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it,' Rev. iii. 8. At Ephesus were many adversaries, yet the door was kept open; Christ carries the keys of the church-door at his girdle: 'He that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth,' Rev. iii. 7. 'The key of the house of David,' Isa. xxii. 22. The church is Christ's house, and the Master will keep the key of his own door. Fourthly, Prayer hath a mighty power with God to preserve or restore liberty to his gospel and messengers; it hath fetched home his servants from banishment, it hath brought them out of their dungeon; the prison could not hold Peter, when the church was at prayer for him. It hath had a mighty influence in the church's affairs, when at the lowest ebb. It was a sad world to the church in Nero's time, when Paul set the saints to pray for kings, and those that were in authority; which prayers, though they were not answered in Nero, yet I doubt not but afterward they were in Constantine, and other christian princes, under whose royal wing the church of Christ was cherished and protected. Lastly, Pray for the liberty, because when the gospel goes away, it goes not alone, but carries your other mercies with it. Where the minister hath not liberty to preach the truth, the people will not long have liberty to profess it; nor can that place expect long to enjoy its outward peace: when God removes his gospel, it is to make way for worse company, even all his sore plagues and judgments, Jer. vi. 8.

SECTION IV.—Secondly, When the apostle desires utterance to be given him, he means, that he may have a word given him to preach; according to that which Christ promiseth, Matt. x. 19: 'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.' First, Note that ministers have no ability of their own for their work. O, how long may they sit tumbling their books over, and puzzling their brains, until God comes to their help! and then (as Jacob's venison) it is brought to their hand. If God drop not down his assistance, we write with a pen that hath no ink; if any one need walk dependently upon God more than another, the minister is he. Secondly, Observe that those who are most eminent for gifts and grace, have meanest thoughts of themselves, and are acquainted most with their own insufficiency. Paul himself is not ashamed to let Christians know that if God brings it not into him, he cannot deal out to them; he cannot speak a word to them, till he receives it from God. 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament,' 2 Cor. iii. 5, 6: he is the able minister whom God enables. Thirdly, Observe the meanest Christian may, by his faithful prayers, help to make the minister's sermon for him: 'Pray,' saith the apostle, that utterance may be given me;' that I may have from God what I should deliver to others. O, what a useful instrument is a praying Christian! He may not only help his own minister, but others, all the world over. Paul was now at Rome and sends for prayers as far as Ephesus.

SECTION V.—Thirdly, By 'utterance' he may mean a faculty of speech, a readiness and facility to deliver to others what he hath been enabled to conceive in his own mind of the will of God. Many eminent servants of God have been very sensible of, and much discouraged in consequence of, their deficiency of speech, and imperfect delivery. Now, this may proceed from a natural cause, or supernatural. First, From a natural cause; as, 1. From a defect in the instruments of speech, which some think was the cause of Moses's complaint, Exod. iv. 10: 'I am not eloquent,' but 'slow of speech;' and this discouraged him from being sent on God's errand. But God can make up for the imperfection of the tongue with the Divine power of the matter delivered: thus Moses,

Digitized by Google

who was so slow in speech, was mighty in words, Acts vii. 22, able to make Pharaoh's stout heart tremble, though he might stammer in the delivery of it, God promised indeed to be with his mouth, yet it is probable he did not cure his natural infirmity, for we find him complaining afterward of it. Such natural imperfections, therefore, should neither discourage the minister, nor prejudice the people: but rather make him more careful, that the matter be weighty which he delivers; and then, that their attention be more close and united. 2. From a weak memory: he that reads in a bad print, cannot read fast and smooth, but will often be stopped to study what is next. Memory is an inward table or book, out of which the minister reads his sermon unseen. If the notions or meditations we have to deliver, be not fairly imprinted on our memory, no wonder that the tongue is often at a stand, except we should speak to no purpose. When God hath assisted in the study, we need him to strengthen our memory in the pulpit. 3. From fear: if the heart faint, it is no wonder the tongue falters. This, it is likely, was at the bottom of Jeremiah's excuse, chap. i. 6: 'Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child;' that is, I want the courage and spirit of a man to wrestle with those oppositions that will certainly meet me in the work: this appears by the method God takes for the cure, ver. 7, 8: 'Say not, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee:—be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee.' Secondly, From a supernatural cause; where none of these defects are, but the minister stands best furnished, and in greatest readiness for his work; yet let but God turn the cock, and there is a stop put to the whole work. Not only the preparation of the heart, but the answer of the tongue, both are from the Lord, Prov. xvi. 1. God keeps the key of the mouth as well as of the heart; not a word can be uttered, until God opens the door of the lips to give it a free egress. He opened the mouth of the ass, and stopped the mouth of that wicked prophet, its master, Numb. xxii. 28—31: hear him confessing as much to Balak, ver. 38: 'Lo, I am come unto thee; have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.' Never man desired more to be speaking that which should have got him his hire, the wages of unrighteousness, than Balaam, for he loved it dearly: but God prevented him. Nay, even holy men, when they would speak the truth, and that for God, cannot give utterance to what they have conceived: hence David's prayer, 'Open my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.' God tells Ezekiel, he would make his tongue cleave to his mouth; he should not reprove them, though he would, chap. iii. 26.

Section VI.—Do ministers depend thus on God for utterance? This speaks to you, my brethren in the Lord's work. Do nothing for which God may stop your mouths when you come into the pulpit.

First, Take heed of any sin smothering in your bosom. Canst thou believe God will assist thee in his work, who canst lend thy hand to the devil's? Mayest thou not rather fear he should hang a padlock on thy lips, and strike thee dumb, when thou goest about thy work? You remember the story of Origen, how after his great fall he was silenced in the pulpit; for at the reading of that passage, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes? or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?' the consciousness of his sin would not suffer him to speak. O, it is sad, when the preacher meets his own sin in his subject, and pronounceth sentence against himself while he reads his text! If thou wouldst have God assist thee, be zealous, and repent; when the trumpet is washed, then the Holy Spirit will again breathe through it. Secondly, Beware thou come not in the confidence of thy own preparations: God hath declared himself against this kind of pride, 1 Sam. ii. 9, 'By strength shall no man prevail.' A little bread, with God's blessing may make a meal for a multitude; and great provision may soon shrink to nothing, if God help not in the breaking of it. It is not thy sermon in thy head, or notes in thy book, that will enable thee to preach, except God open thy mouth; acknowledge, therefore, God in all thy ways, and lean not to thy own understanding: the swelling of the heart, as well as of the wall, goes before a fall. Did the Ephraimites take it so ill, that Gideon should steal a victory without calling them to his help? How much more may it provoke God, when thou goest to the pulpit, and passest by his door in the way, without calling for his assistance?

Digitized by Google

The people should take heed not to stop the minister's mouth: this they may do, First, By admiring his gifts, and applauding his person, especially when this is accompanied with unthankfulness to God who gives him; when they applaud the man, but do not bless God for him. Princes have an evil eye upon those subjects that are over popular. God will not let his creature stand in his light, nor have his honour suffer by the reputation of his instrument: the mother is not pleased at seeing the child more fond of the nurse than of herself. O, how foolish are we, who cannot love, but we must dote;—cannot honour, but we must adore also! To over-do, is the ready way to undo. Many fair mercies are lost either by too much or too little affection for the minister; the abilities of one are magnified, in order to depreciate those of another;—I am of Paul, and I of Apollos; thus the disciples advanced their preacher, to hold up a faction. Secondly, You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance, by expecting the benefit from man, and not from God; as if it were nothing but to take up your cloak and Bible, and you are sure to get good by such a one's ministry; this is like those who said, 'We will go into such a city, and get gain,' as if it were no more to hear with profit, than to go to the tap, and draw wine. It is proper thou shouldst find the minister straitened, and his abilities bound up, because thou comest to him, as unto God, who is but a poor instrument. O, say not unto him, 'Give me grace, give me comfort, as Rachel asked children of her husband; but go to thy God for these, in thy attendance on man. Thirdly, By rebelling against the light of truth that shines forth upon you in his ministry. God sometimes stops the minister's mouth, because the people shut their hearts; Christ himself did not many mighty works ('he could not,' saith Mark), in his own country, because of the people's unbelief. It is just God should take away the ministry, or stop the minister's mouth, when they despise his counsel, and the word becomes a reproach to them. I am sure it is a sad damp to the minister's spirit that preacheth long to a gainsaying people, and no good omen to them. The mother's milk goes away sometimes before the child's death: God binds up the spirit of his messengers in judgment, Ezek. iii. 26: 'I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover; for they are a rebellious house.'

CHAPTER IV.

SHEWS WHAT A MYSTERY IS, AND IN WHAT RESPECTS THE GOSPEL IS SO.

THE third branch in the words presents us with the end why he desires their prayers for utterance to be granted him,—'That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel;' where there are three things.

SECTION I.—The gospel is a mystery. Some derive the Greek word *μυστηριον*, from *μυσω*, to teach any secret belonging to religion; others from *μυω*, or *μυζω*, to shut the mouth, because those that were initiated, or admitted to be present at the religious rites and mysteries of the heathens (who were called *μυσται*), might not reveal them to those that were *αμυστοι*, or not initiated; therefore they had an image before the temple, holding his finger upon his mouth, to put them in mind, as they went in and out, of keeping secret what was done within. Indeed, the mysteries in their idolatrous worship were so impure and filthy, that nothing but secrecy could keep them from being abhorred and detested by the more sober part of mankind. And it is not unworthy our noting, that the Spirit of God should make choice of that word in the New Testament so often, to express the holy doctrine of truth and salvation contained in it, which were so vilely abused by those heathenish idolaters. Surely, it shews them to be over scrupulous, that judge it unlawful any way to make use of those names or things which have been abused by heathens or idolaters. But to return to the word 'mystery;' it is generally applied to any secret,—natural, civil, or religious, which lies out of the road of vulgar understandings; in Scripture it is generally used for religious secrets; and is taken both in an evil and good sense. First, In an evil sense, 2 Thess. ii. 7: 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work;' whereby is meant the secret rising of anti-christian dominion, whereof some foundations were laid in the apostles' days. Error

Digitized by Google

is but a day younger than truth. When the gospel began first to be preached by Christ and his apostles, error presently put forth her hand to take it by the heel, and supplant it. The whole system of antichrist is a mystery of policy and impiety; mystery is written upon the whore of Babylon's forehead, Rev. xvii. 2; and Causabon tells us, the same word was written upon the Pope's mitre; if so, it is well he would own his name: 'My soul, enter not thou into their secrets.' Secondly, In a good sense; sometimes for some particular branch of evangelical truth: thus the rejection of the Jews, and calling of the Gentiles, is called a mystery, Rom. xi. 25: the wonderful change of those who shall be upon earth at the end of the world, 1 Cor. xv. 51: the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, 1 Tim. iii. 16, &c.: sometimes for the whole of the gospel, as to the doctrine of it, called a 'mystery of faith,' 1 Tim. iii. 9: as to the purity of its precepts, and rules for a holy life, a mystery of godliness: as to the Author, subject, and end of it, called the 'mystery of Christ,' Eph. iii. 4; it was revealed by him, treats of him, and leads souls to him: and lastly, in regard of the blessed reward it promiseth to all that sincerely embrace it, called the 'mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark iv. 11. This gospel is the glorious mystery we are now to speak of; and we are to shew in what respect it is a mystery, or why so called by the Spirit of God.

SECTION II.—First, Because it is known only by divine revelation. Such a secret it is as the wit of man could never have found out. There are many secrets in nature which, with much study, have at last been discovered; as the medicinal virtue of plants, &c.; but the gospel is a secret, and contains in it such mysteries as the following:—What man or angel could have thought of such a way for reconciling God and man, as in the gospel is laid out? How impossible was it for them to have conjectured what purposes of love were locked up in the heart of God toward fallen man, till himself opened the cabinet of his own counsel? Or had God given them some hint of a purpose he had for man's recovery, could they ever have so much as thought of such a way as the gospel brings to light? Surely, as none but God could lay the plot, so none but himself could make it known; the gospel therefore is called 'a revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began,' Rom. xvi. 25. Secondly, Because the truths of the gospel, when revealed, exceed the grasp of human understanding: they are to the eye of our reason, as the sun is to the eye of our body, which dazzles and overpowers the most piercing apprehension; they disdain to be discussed and tried by human reason. That there are three subsistencies in the Godhead, and but one Divine essence, we believe, because they are revealed; but he that shall fly too near this light, thinking to comprehend this mysterious truth in his narrow reason, will soon find himself lost in his bold enterprise. God and man united in Christ's person, is undeniably demonstrable from the gospel: but, alas! the cordage of our understanding is too short to fathom this great deep: 'Without controversy,' saith the apostle, 'great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh,' 1 Tim. iii. 16. It is a truth without controversy, it is confessed of all; yet such a mystery as cannot be comprehended by our short understanding. That there is no name but the name of Jesus, by which we can be saved, is the grand notion of the gospel; but how many mysteries are wrapt up in one truth! Who that should have seen the babe Jesus when he lay in the manger, and afterward meanly bred under as carpenter, and at last executed for a malefactor, could have imagined that upon such weak hinges should move such a glorious design for man's salvation? But who dares think it unreasonable to believe that, upon God's report, to be true, which he cannot make out by his own understanding? Some things we apprehend by reason, that cannot be known by sense; as that the sun is larger than the earth: some things by sense, which cannot be found out by reason;—that the load-stone attracts iron, and not gold, our eye beholds; but why it should—there our reason is lost. Now, if in nature we question not the truth of these, though sense be at a loss in one, and reason in the other, shall we in religion doubt of that to be true, which drops from God's own mouth, because it exceeds our weak understanding? Wouldst thou see a reason, saith Augustine, for all that God saith, look into thy own understanding, and thou wilt find a reason why thou seest not a reason.

SECTION III.—Thirdly, It is a mystery in regard of the paucity of those to

Digitized by Google

whom it is revealed. Secrets are whispered into the ears of a few, and not exposed to all: 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark iv. 11. Who were those, but a few disciples who believed on his name? The greater part of the world were ever strangers to this mystery. Before Christ's time it was confined within a little spot of ground of the Jewish nation; since it came abroad into the Gentile world, and hath been travelling, above sixteen hundred years, hither and thither, how few at this day are acquainted with it! Indeed, where its glorious light shines long, many get a superficial knowledge of it: it were strange that men should walk long in the sun, and not have their faces a little tanned; but the spiritual and saving knowledge of this mystery is revealed but to few; for the number of saints is not great, compared with the reprobate world.

Fourthly, It is a mystery in regard of the sort of men to whom it is chiefly imparted, such as are in reason most unlikely to dive into any great mysteries; those who are despised by the wise world as poor and base? 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise;—the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,' 1 Cor. i. 26, 27. If we have a secret to reveal, we do not choose weak and shallow heads to impart it unto; but here is a mystery which babes understand, and wise men are ignorant of: 'I thank thee, O Father, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' The people who were so scorned by the proud Pharisees, as those that knew not the law, John vii. 49, to them was the gospel revealed, while these doctors were left in ignorance: it is revealed to the poor many times, and hid from kings and princes; Christ passeth often by palaces to visit the poor cottages. Herod could get nothing from Christ, Luke xxiii. 9, whereas he opens the saving truths of the gospel to the poor woman of Samaria. Pilate missed Christ on the bench, while the poor thief finds him, and heaven with him, on the cross; devout women are passed by, and left to perish with their blind zeal while harlots and publicans are converted by him.

Section IV.—Fifthly, a mystery in regard of the kind of knowledge which the saints themselves have of it. First, Their knowledge is but in part, and imperfect; they know little now, in comparison of what they shall know hereafter. The gospel is as a rich piece of arras, rolled up; this God hath been unfolding ever since the first promise was made to Adam, opening it still every age wider than before; but the world shall sooner be at an end, than this mystery be fully known. Indeed, as a river grows broader as it approacheth nearer the sea; so the knowledge of this mystery spreadeth every age more and more. The gospel appeared but a little spring in Adam's time, whose whole Bible was bound up in a single promise; this increased to a rivulet in Abraham's time, and this rivulet enlarged itself into a river in the days of the prophets; but when Christ came in the flesh, then knowledge flowed in amain; the least in the gospel state is said to be greater than the greatest before Christ appeared: so that, in comparison of the darker times of the law, the knowledge Christians now have, is great; but compared with the knowledge they shall have in heaven, it is little. Secondly, It is mysterious and dark: gospel truths are not known in their native glory and beauty, but in shadows; we are said, indeed, 'with open face to behold the glory of God,' but still it is 'as in a glass.' Now you know the glass presents us with the image, not with the face itself; we do not see gospel truths as indeed they are, but as our weak eyes can bear the knowledge of them. Indeed, this glass of the gospel is clearer than that of the law; we see truths through a thinner veil. Baptism is clearer than circumcision, the Lord's supper than the passover; in a word, the New Testament is clearer than the Old; yet there is nothing of heaven revealed in the gospel, but it is translated into our earthly language, because we are unable, while here below, to understand its original: who knows, or can conceive, what the joys of heaven are, so as to speak of them in their own idiom? But we know what a feast is, a kingdom is, with riches and treasures. Now heaven is set out by those things which in this world bear the greatest price in men's thoughts: in heaven is a feast, yet without meat; riches, without money; a kingdom, without robes and crowns, because infinitely above these; hence it is said, 'It doth not appear what we shall be,' 1 John iii. 2. Our apprehensions of these things are manly,

Digitized by Google

compared with those under the law; but childish, compared with the knowledge which glorified saints have; therefore, as Paul saith, 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 11, he put away childish things, when he grew up into farther knowledge of the gospel; so he tells us of an imperfect knowledge, which yet he had, that must be done away, when that which is perfect is come.

Sixthly, The gospel is a mystery, in regard of the contrary operation it hath upon the hearts of men; the eyes of some it opens, others it blinds. Some when they hear the gospel are pricked in their hearts, and cry out, 'What shall we do to be saved?' others are hardened by it, and their consciences seared into a greater stupidity. At Paul's sermon, Acts xvii., some mocked; others were so affected that they desired to hear it again; what a mysterious doctrine is this, that sets one a-laughing, another a-weeping! that is the savour of life to some, and of death to others!

SECTION V.—Lastly, A mystery it is, in regard of those rare and strange effects it hath upon the godly, and that both in respect of their judgments and practice. As the gospel is a mystery of faith, so it enables them to believe strange mysteries; to believe that which they understand not, and hope for that which they do not see; it enables them to believe Three to be One, and One to be Three; a Trinity of Persons in the Deity, and an Unity of Essence; a Father, not older than his Son; a Son, not inferior to his Father; a Holy Spirit proceeding from both, yet equal to both. It teacheth them to believe that Christ was born in time, and that he was from everlasting; that he was comprehended within the Virgin's womb, and yet the heaven of heavens not able to contain him: to be the Son of Mary, and yet her Maker; to be born without sin, and yet justly to have died for sin. They believe that God was just in punishing Christ, though innocent; and in justifying penitent believers, who are sinners; they believe themselves to be great sinners, and yet that God sees them in Christ without spot or wrinkle. Again, as the gospel is a mystery of godliness, it enables them to do as strange things as they believe; to live by another's spirit, to act from another's strength, to live to another's will, and aim at another's glory; they live by the Spirit of Christ, act with his strength, are determined by his will, and aim at his glory: it makes them so gentle, that a child may lead them to anything that is good; yet so stout, that fire shall not frighten them into sin: they can love their enemies, and yet, for Christ's sake, can hate father and mother: it makes them diligent in their worldly calling, yet enables them to contemn the riches they have obtained by God's blessing on their labour; they are taught by it, that all things are theirs, yet they dare not take a pin from the wicked by force or fraud: it makes them so humble as to prefer every one above themselves; yet so to value their own condition, that the poorest among them would not change his estate with the greatest monarch of the world: it makes them thank God for health, and for sickness also: to rejoice when exalted, and not to repine when made low; they can pray for life, and at the same time desire to die!

CHAPTER V.

THE REASON WHY THE GOSPEL IS SLIGHTED AND PERSECUTED.

THE reason why the gospel is so slighted and rejected by the wicked world is, because the blessings of the gospel are a mystery, and carnal hearts know them not, therefore care not for them. The things it propounds are liked well enough, might they have them in a way suited to their carnal apprehensions. The gospel opens a mine of unsearchable riches, but in a mystery; it shews men a way how to be rich in faith, rich in God, rich for another world, while poor in this. Our Saviour instructed the young man in the gospel how to be rich; not by purchasing more land, but by selling what he had; but he would not follow his counsel. The gospel reveals pleasures and delights, but not such as the sensual world is fond of: gospel pleasures suit not their palate, because they are pleasures in a mystery, pleasures in mourning for sin, and mortifying sin; not pleasures in satisfying it: pleasures in communion with Christ; pleasures to the eye and palate of faith, not of sense; to feed their souls, not to pamper and fatten their bodies: in a word, the gospel makes a discovery of high and choice notions. Surely those who are the more sober part of the world, who crave

Digitized by Google

intellectual food, and prize a lecture more than a feast, will be highly pleased with the truths the gospel brings to light, being such rare mysteries that they can find in no other book; yet we see that the gospel as little pleases this rank of men, as any other. Had it been filled with flowers of rhetoric, chemical experiments, philosophical notions, or maxims of policy, how greedily would they have embraced it! But it is wisdom in a mystery: 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought,' 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7. Bradwardine, a great scholar, before he was meekened by the grace of the gospel, slighted Paul's epistles, (as afterward he confessed,) because he did not express *ingenium metaphysicum*,—a metaphysical head in his discourses. Secondly, It shews us the reason why the gospel and its professors are not only slighted, but hated and persecuted; for the gospel is a mystery which the world knows not, and therefore opposed by it. Ignorance is the mother of persecution; 'Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.' The greatest enemies the gospel ever had were not the sensual, and openly profane, but the superstitious and ignorantly devout; these are they who have shown most fury against the gospel. Paul tells us of the devout persons that cruelly persecuted him, Acts xiii. 50. No one was more inveterate against the truth than Paul himself, who was a strict Pharisee. What reason, then, have we to pray for the increase of gospel-light! The more the gospel is known, the more kindly will it be entertained. Again, the professors of the gospel are hated, because they partake of its mysterious nature. They are high-born, but in a mystery; you cannot see their birth by their outward breeding; arms they bear, and revenues they have to live on, but not such as the world judges the greatness of persons and families by: no, their outside is mean, while their inside is glorious; and the world values them by what they know and see of their external part, and not by their inward graces; they pass as princes in the disguise of some poor man's clothes through the world, and their entertainment is accordingly. Had Christ put on his robes of glory and majesty when he came into the world, surely he had not gone out of it with so shameful and cruel a death. The world would have trembled at his footstool, which some of them did, when but a beam of his Deity looked forth upon them. Did saints walk on earth in those robes which they shall wear in heaven, then they would be feared and admired by those who now scorn and despise them. But as God's design in Christ's first coming would not have been fulfilled, had he so appeared; neither would his design in his saints, did the world know them, as one day they shall; therefore he is pleased to let them lie hid under the mean coverings of poverty and infirmities, that so he may exercise their suffering graces, and also accomplish his wrath upon the wicked for theirs against them. Thirdly, The gospel is a mystery. This shews us the reason why carnal men do so bungle, when they meddle with matters of religion; let them speak of gospel truths, what ignorance do they show! Do we not see that those who in worldly affairs will give you a wise answer, in the truths of the gospel speak like babes? Yea, even those that have some knowledge of the Scriptures, how dry and unsavoury is their discourse on spiritual things! They are like a parable in a fool's mouth. When they engage in any duty of religion,—pray, hear the word, or meditate upon what they have heard, you had as good give a workman's tools to him that was never of the trade; they know not how to handle them. Every trade hath its mystery, and religion above all other callings, which none but those that are instructed in it, know how to manage.

CHAPTER VI.

SEVERAL DUTIES PRESSED FROM THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL; AND AN EXHORTATION TO THE SAINTS.

SECTION I.—Be thankful that ever God revealed the mystery of the gospel to thee. O, what a mercy is this, that thou hast life and immortality brought to light, that thy ears hear this joyful sound! Never came such joyful news to us, as the gospel brings. What a poor nation was this, before the gospel-day broke among us! Bless God that thy lot is cast where the sun is up. The gospel was indeed early preached in the world; Adam had it soon after his fall; but it was

Digitized by Google

a short gospel; a mystery indeed to him, all wrapped up in one promise, and that a dark one; but now that one wedge of gold is beaten out into the whole Bible, a gospel, written at length, and not in figures. You hear the gospel preached, not in law terms, as the Jews did under Moses, but in gospel language; the veil is taken off which hid the beauty of gospel truths; you hear it after it hath been rescued out of Antichrist's hands, by whom for many ages it was kept prisoner. You live not in those dark times, when gospel truths were embased with the mean alloy of schoolmen's subtleties, and superstitious vanities, when more stones were given to break the teeth, than bread to feed the souls constantly; every sabbath day you have your fill of its sweetest truths. Were it not sad, if they should be found to have been more thankful for the little dawning of gospel light, which then peeped forth, than you for its meridian light who live to see the Sun of Righteousness with his healing wings spread forth upon you? But especially bless God for any inward light and life thou hast received from this gospel. God hath done more for thee in this, than for thousands. To this day God hath not given thy carnal neighbours eyes to see, nor hearts to perceive, that mystery which is unfolded unto thee. Are you thankful to him that hath taught you your worldly trade, from which you derive a livelihood for your body? O, what praise then, do you owe to your God, who, by instructing you in this mystery, hath learned you the art of saving your souls. God delights to give his mercy to those that will resound his praise most.

Section II.—The gospel is a mystery, therefore rest not in thy present attainments; either in thy knowledge, as it is a mystery of faith, or thy practice, as it is a mystery of godliness. First, Rest not in thy present knowledge. It is likely thou knowest much to what thou once didst, but thou knowest little to what thou mayest. The gospel is a mystery that will take up more than thy lifetime to understand. Mysteries are here sown thick; thou diggest where the springs rise faster upon thee. God does not disclose all his secrets at once, but here a little, and there a little; 'Men shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' Dan. xii. 4. The Christian is not enriched with this heavenly treasure all at one time, or in one ordinance. The true lover of learning gives not over this pursuit for a little smattering knowledge he gets, but studies harder than the freshman, because as he knows more of learning, so by that knowledge he understands his own deficiency better. Secondly, Rest not in thy practice, as it is a mystery of godliness; let not a little grace serve thy turn, but seek more. First, Compare not thyself with those that have less than thyself, but look on those that have far exceeded thee: to look on our inferiors occasions pride,—'I am not as this publican,' saith the Pharisee; but looking on others more eminent than ourselves will both preserve humility, and be a spur to diligence. The progress some have made in grace, didst thou but keep them in thine eye, would not suffer thee to be quiet till thou hast overtaken them. May be thou hast some victory over thy passion, but didst thou never hear how meek a man Moses was, that could bear the murmurings of the multitude, yea, the envy of his brother and sister, and yet his heart not take fire? Thou hast some good affections toward God, but how far short of holy David's zeal, whose heart ran out to God, as soon as his eyes were open in the morning! 'When I awake I am still with thee;' thrice a day, yea, seven times a day he would praise his God. Thou hast some patience, but hast thou learnt to write after Job's copy? Thou art not without faith, but art thou like Abraham, strong in faith to follow God, when thou knowest not whither he will lead thee? Secondly, The grace thou hast will soon be less if thou art not diligent. Some men in their worldly trade can say at the year's end, they have neither got nor lost; but thou canst say at the day's end, that thou art better or worse than thou wert in the morning. Thirdly, It is the design of the gospel to give grace in great measures; Christ gives life, and that more abundantly, John x. 10. Now, shall the fountain be so large, and the pitcher we carry to it so little! Wherefore doth God open his hand to such a breadth in the promise, but to widen our desires, and encourage our endeavours? Fourthly, The more grace thou hast, the easier it will be to add to it; a little learning is got with more difficulty by a young scholar, than a great deal afterward.

Section III.—Bear with one another's imperfections. You see the gospel is a mystery, do not wonder therefore that any are not presently masters of their

Digitized by Google

art. Christ bears with the saints' imperfections; well may the saints bear one with another. How deficient were the disciples in their knowledge! How long did they stand at one lesson before they could learn it! 'Do ye now believe?' says Christ, John xvi. 31. He had inculcated the same thing often, before it entered his minds; yet, alas! we can hardly have a good opinion of, or hold communion with those that are not every way of our judgment, and cannot see things so clear as ourselves. Surely we mistake the nature of the gospel, as if there were none but plain points in it. Blessed be God, as to principles necessary to salvation, though their nature be high and mysterious, yet they are clearly and plainly asserted in the word: 'Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. iii. 16. Godliness is a mystery; but as to the main fundamental points of it, there is no dispute among the faithful. There are some points more remote from the vital parts of religion, that have knots not easily untied, which make some difference of judgment; but it is not every excess or defect makes a monster, as six or four fingers on the hand, but an excess or defect in some principal part; neither doth every mistake make a monster in religion. Remember that the gospel is a mystery, and you will bear with one another's ignorance the better; and when love hath once laid the dust which passion and prejudice have blown in your eyes, we shall then stand at greater advantage for finding out truth. Again, bear with weakness in the practical part of religion. Godliness, as well as the doctrine of faith, is a mystery. All saints are not of a height; Christ hath some children in his family that are laid with strings, as well as others that go strongly without such help: some act more upon pure gospel principles, (love and a spirit of adoption;) others have not yet worn off their legal fears and terrors: some are got higher up the hill of faith, and have clearer apprehensions of their spiritual state; others are nearer the bottom, who are wrapped up with many clouds of perplexing fears and doubts: in a word, some are got farther out of their passions, have greater mastery over their corruptions, than others; pity thy weak brother, and take him by the hand for his help, but despise him not; God can make him stand and suffer thee to fall: Christ doth not quench the smoking flax,—why should we? The weak Christian is welcome to his heavenly Father, as well as the strong; why should he not be so to his brethren? But alas, the proverb is here too true. 'Better speak to the master, than the man; the father, than the child.'—Those that can be so bold with God, dare not be free with their fellow-servants and brethren.

SECTION IV.—Is the gospel a mystery? then, Christian, long for heaven; there, and only there, shall this mystery be fully known. The great things which were spoken concerning the gospel church, made many saints and prophets, before Christ's time, desire to see those happy times wherein such revelations should be made; how much more should we long for heaven, where this great mystery shall be fully opened, and every box of this cabinet unlocked, in which lie so many precious jewels to this day unseen by any saint on earth! Then it will be said 'The mystery of God is finished,' Rev. x. 7. Here we learn our knowledge of it by little and little, like one that reads a book as it comes from the press, sheet by sheet; there we shall see it altogether: here we get a little light from this sermon, a little more from the next and thus our stock increases, some to-day, and more to-morrow; but there we shall have all at once: here we learn with much pain and difficulty, there without travail and trouble: glorified, saints though they cease not from work, yet rest from labour: here passion blinds our minds, that we mistake error for truth, and truth for error; but there these clouds shall be scattered and gone: here the weakness of natural parts keeps many in the dark, and renders them incapable of apprehending some truths, which others are led into; but there the strong shall not prevent the weak, the scholar shall know as much as his master, the people as their minister; here the contentions among the godly leave the weaker sort at great uncertainty what to think concerning many truths; but there they shall all agree, which comforted the holy man on his death-bed, that he was going thither, where Luther and Calvin were reconciled: here we are disturbed in our inquiries after truth, one while the necessary occasions of this world divert us, another while the weakness and infirmities of our bodies hinder us; but in heaven our bodies will call for none of this tend-

Digitized by Google

ing, we shall need neither raiment for the back, nor food for the body. O, happy death that will ease us of all the aches of our bodies, and conflicts in our souls! Thou art the only physician to cure all the saints' distempers. When that blessed hour comes, then lift up your heads with joy, for it will lead you into that blissful place where you shall see Christ, not a great way off, not with the eye of faith, in the optic glass of an ordinance or promise, but with a glorified eye behold his very person, never more to lose the sight of him: thou shalt not taste his love in a little morsel of sacramental bread, and sip of wine, but lay thy mouth to the fountain, and from his bosom drink thy full draught. Thou shalt no more hear what a glorious place heaven is, as thou wert wont to have it set forth by the poor rhetoric of mortal man, preaching to thee of that with which himself was but little acquainted; but shalt walk thyself in the streets of that glorious city, and bless thyself, to think what poor, low thoughts thou and thy minister also had thereof, when on earth thou didst meditate, and he preached, on this subject: one moment's sight of that glory will inform thee more than all the books written of it were able to do. And dost thou not yet cry out, How long wilt it be, O Lord, most holy and true, before thou bringest me thither? Is not every hour a day, day a month, month a year, yea, age, till that time comes? As Bernard, upon those words, John xvi. 16: 'A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again, A little while, and ye shall see me,' passionately breaks forth:—Holy Lord, dost thou call that a little while in which I shall not see thee? O, this little is a long little while!

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXHORTATION TO STUDY THIS MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL.

Be you provoked, who are yet strangers to this mystery, to seek the knowledge of it; yea, endeavour to gain an intimate acquaintance with it: to move you thereunto, I shall make use of two arguments.

SECTION I.—First, Consider the Author of it. That book must needs be worth reading, which hath God for the author: that mystery deserves our knowledge, which is the product of his infinite wisdom and love. There is a Divine glory sitting upon the face of all God's works; it is impossible so excellent an artist should put his hand to an ignoble work: 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all,' Psa. civ. 24. But there is not the same glory to be seen in all his works. Our apostle tells us, 'there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon; one star differs from another in glory.' Now, among all the works of God, that of man's redemption may well pass for the master-piece; the world itself was set up to be a stage for the acting of this piece of providence, wherein the manifold wisdom of God is so curiously wrought, that angels themselves pry into it, and are wrapped in admiration of it, Eph. iii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 12. God's works deserve our study, and those most wherein he hath drawn the clearest portraiture of himself. The gospel mystery, therefore, above all other, should be searched into by us, being the only glass in which the glory of God is with open face to be seen. Secondly, Consider the subject-matter of the gospel,—Christ, and the way of salvation through him. What poor and low ends have all worldly mysteries! one to make us rich, another to make us great and honourable in the world, but none to make us holy here, or happy hereafter; this is learned only from the knowledge of Christ, who is revealed in the gospel, and nowhere else. No doubt Solomon's natural history, in which he treated of all trees, from the cedar to the hyssop; of all beasts, fowls, and creeping things, was a rare piece in its kind; yet one leaf of the gospel is of infinitely more worth to us than all that large volume would have been; so much more precious, by how much the knowledge of God in Christ is better than the knowledge of beasts and birds. And we have reason to think it a mercy that that book is lost and laid out of our sight, which we should have been prone to have studied more than the Bible; not that it was better, but more suitable to the mould of our carnal minds. But to a gracious soul, enlightened with saving knowledge, no book is equal to the Bible. Paul was an excellent scholar, he wanted not that learning which commends men to the world; yet he counts all things but loss in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord, Phil. iii. 8.

Digitized by Google

Well might he say so; for a man may feed all his lifetime on human learning, and be lost at last. It was the saying of Bonaventure, that he had rather lose all his philosophy, than one article of his faith. We read that those, Acts xix., were no sooner converted, but they burned their books of curious arts; neither were they losers by it, for they had got acquaintance with one book that was worth them all. Of all creatures in this visible world, light is the most glorious: of all light, the light of the sun is incomparably the most excellent. Were this eye of the world put out, the earth would be a grave, in which we should be buried alive. What were the Egyptians while under the plague of darkness, but like so many dead men? They had friends, but could not see them; estates abroad, but could not enjoy them. Now, what the sun is to the sensible world, that is Christ in the gospel to the intellectual world of souls: without this light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ, what can the soul do or enjoy aright? Man's soul is of high, yea, royal extraction; for God is the Father of spirits; but this child meets his heavenly Father in the dark and knows him not: 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not,' John i. 10. As the soul is of high birth, so it is intended for a high end,—to glorify and enjoy God its maker. Now, for want of the knowledge of Christ, it can do neither; but debaseth itself to the drudgery of sin, and sensual embraces of the creature, instead of God, for whom it was at first made. O, how should we prize and study this mystery, which brings us to the true knowledge of God, and the way how we may enjoy happiness with him! Man's primitive happiness consisted in God's love to him, and his likeness to God. The gospel discovers a way how man may be restored to both. The first it doth, as it is a mystery of faith, by revealing Christ and his atonement for our reconciliation with God. The latter, as it is a mystery of godliness, and the instrument which Christ useth in the hand of his Spirit to create man anew, and, as it were, the tool to re-engrave the image of God upon him.

Section II.—But how may we be led into the saving knowledge of this mystery? First, Think not to obtain it by the strength of thy reason or natural parts; it is not learned as secrets in nature or human arts, of which those that have the most piercing wit and the strongest brain soonest get the mastery. None have been more mistaken, or erred more foully in their apprehensions about gospel truths, than great scholars, the cause whereof may be, partly, their pride and self-confidence, which God ever was and will be an enemy to; and also because the mysteries of the gospel do not agree with the principles of carnal reason and wisdom, whence it comes to pass that the wiser part of the world have commonly rejected the grand principles of evangelical faith as absurd and irrational. Tell a wise Arian that Christ is God and man in one person; and he laughs at it, as they did at Paul when he mentioned the resurrection of the body, Acts xvii. 32, because the key of his understanding fits not the wards of this lock: when a merit-monger hears of being justified by faith, and not by works, it will not go down with him. It seems as ridiculous to him that a man should be justified by the righteousness which another fulfils, as for a man to live by the meat another eats, and be warmed with the clothes another wears. Tell him, when he hath lived ever so holily, he must renounce his own work, and be beholden to another's merit, you shall as soon persuade him to sell his estate, and get his living by begging at another's door. These are hard sayings, at which they take offence, and go away, or labour to pervert the simplicity of gospel revelation to their own sense. Resolve, therefore, to come, when thou readest the gospel, not to dispute with thy Maker, but to believe what he reveals to be his mind. Call not divine mysteries to give an account to thy shallow understanding; what is this but to try a prince at a subject's bar? When thou hast laid aside the pride of thy reason, then thou art fit to be admitted a scholar in Christ's school.

But must we cease to be men when we become Christians? No; we cease not to be men, but to be proud men, when we lay aside the confidence of our own understanding to acquiesce in the wisdom and truth of God. An implicit faith is absurd and irrational when a man requires it of us, who may deceive, or be deceived in what he saith. But when God speaks, it is all the reason in the world we should believe what he saith to be true, though we cannot com-

Digitized by Google

prehend what he saith; for we know he who is infinite wisdom cannot himself be deceived, and he who is truth and faithfulness will not deceive.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Thou must become a disciple to Christ. Men do not teach strangers the mystery of their trade, but their servants, and such as are willing to be bound to them; neither doth Christ promise to reveal the mysteries of the gospel to any but those that will give up their names to be his servants and disciples: 'Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables,' Mark iv. 11. When once thou hast subscribed to the covenant of the gospel, thy indenture is sealed; Christ is now thy master; he takes thee for one of his family and charge, and will look to thy education: but those on whose hearts he hath no hold, come to the ordinance, but when it is done, return to sin as their trade, and Satan as their lord; is it likely that Christ should teach them? The mysteries of iniquity and of godliness are contrary; the one cannot be learned till the other be unlearned. Thirdly, If thou wouldst learn this mystery to any purpose, content not thyself with a simple knowledge of it. The gospel hath respect both to the head and heart, understanding and will: to the understanding, it is a mystery of faith; to the heart and life, it is a mystery of godliness. Now these two must not be severed: 'Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience,' 1 Tim. iii. 9. Here is both the manna and a golden pot to keep it in: truth laid up in a pure conscience. Knowledge may make thee a scholar, but not a saint; orthodox, but not gracious. What if thou wert able to write a commentary on all the Bible, and from the Scripture couldst confute all the errors and heresies which were at any time broached and vented against the truth, what would this avail thee, while thy own lusts confute, yea, confound thee. 'If I understand all mysteries, and have not charity, I am nothing,' 1 Cor. xiii. 2. He that increaseth in knowledge, and doth not get grace with his knowledge, increaseth sorrow to himself, yea, eternal sorrow. It would be an ease to gospel sinners in hell, if they could erase the remembrance of the gospel out of their memories. In thy knowledge, therefore, of gospel mysteries, labour for two things.

SECTION IV.—First, Thy property in them. Herein lies the pith and marrow of gospel knowledge. When thou findest what Christ hath done and suffered for poor sinners, rest not till thou canst say with Paul, 'Who loved me, and gave himself for me.' When thou readest any precious promise, ask thy soul, Is it spoken to me, or to some other? Am I the pardoned person? Am I the poor in spirit, to whom the kingdom of heaven is promised? Am I one in Christ Jesus, to whom there is no condemnation? How impatient were those two prisoners, till Joseph had opened their dream, that they might know what should befall them! The Scripture will inform you whether your head shall be lifted up to the gibbet in hell, or to the King's court in heaven. Now, in reading or hearing what this is, thou shouldst inquire to know where it lays thee out thy portion, whether in the promise or in the threatening. There is a sweet feast the gospel speaks of, but am I one of Christ's guests that shall sit at it? There are mansions prepared in heaven, but can I find one taken up for me there? Secondly, Labour to find the power and efficacy of gospel truths upon thee. When our first parents had eaten that unhappy fruit which gave them, and all mankind in them, their bane, it is said, then they knew they were naked; doubtless they knew it before their fall, but now they knew it with shame: they knew it, and sought for clothes to cover them, of which they found no want before. I only allude to the place; many know what sin is, but it is not a soul-feeling knowledge; they know they are naked, but are not ashamed of their nakedness; they see no need of Christ's righteousness to cover it. Many know Christ died, and for what he died; but Christ's death is a dead truth to them, it doth not procure the death of their lusts that were the death of him. They know he is risen, but they lie still rotting in the grave of their corruptions: they know Christ is ascended to heaven, but this draws not their souls after him. A philosopher being asked what he had got by philosophy, answered, 'It hath learned me to contemn what others adore, and to bear what others cannot endure.' If one should ask, What have you got by knowing the mystery of the gospel? truly you can give no account worthy of it, except you say, 'I have learned to believe what flesh and blood could never have taught me, and to do

Digitized by Google

what I never could till I had acquaintance with its heavenly truths. This is to know the truth as it is in Jesus, Eph. iv. 21. If gospel truths work not effectually on thee for thy renovation and sanctification, thou art a lost man; they will undoubtedly be a savour of death to thee. How can you then rest till you find them transforming your hearts, and assimilating your lives to their heavenly nature? Thus Paul endeavoured to know the power of Christ's resurrection quickening him to a holy life here, without which he could not attain to a joyful resurrection hereafter, Phil. iii. 10, 11. The gospel is a glass, but not like that in which we see our face; this only shews what our feature is, and leaves it as it was, but that changeth the very complexion of the soul from glory to glory, 2 Cor. iii. 18.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHEWS IT IS THE MINISTER'S DUTY TO MAKE KNOWN THE GOSPEL.

You have had the sublime nature of the gospel set forth; it is a mystery; now follows what the minister's duty is in reference to the gospel; and that is to promulgate and publish this mystery to the sons of men; 'To make known the mystery of the gospel.' Here the minister's work is laid out; he is, with all possible clearness, to open this mystery, and expose it to the view of the people. Mark, the gospel is his subject, and to make it known is his duty; so runs the minister's commission for his office, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature,' Mark xvi. 15. We hear people sometimes saying, The preacher is beside his text; but he is never beside his errand so long as it is the gospel he makes known. Whatever is his text, this is to be his design. His commission is to make known the gospel; to deliver that, therefore, which is not reduced to this is beside his instructions. Nothing but the preaching of the gospel can reach the end for which the gospel ministry was appointed, and that is the salvation of souls: 'After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,' 1 Cor. i. 21. The great book of the creation had lain long enough open before the world's eyes, yet they could never come to the saving knowledge of God by all that divine wisdom which is written with the finger of God in every page thereof; therefore it pleased God to send his servant, that, by preaching the gospel, poor souls might believe on Christ, and believing, might be saved. No doctrine but the gospel can save a soul: nor the gospel itself, except it be made known.

SECTION I.—No doctrine but the gospel can save a soul. Galen may teach you to preserve your health, if you will follow his rules; Lyttleton and other lawyers will teach you how to save your estates; Plato and other philosophers will learn you how to save your credit among men, by an outwardly just, inoffensive life. Their doctrine will be a means to save you from many gross sins, by which you may be applauded by your neighbour on earth, and perhaps less tormented in hell; but it is the gospel alone whereby you can be taught the salvation of your souls. But what do I speak of these? It is not God's own law (the moral, I mean,) that is able to save you. God would never have been at such a vast expense (in the death of his Son) to erect another law, namely, the law of faith, if that would have served for this purpose: 'For if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain,' Gal. ii. 21. Why then do ministers preach the law? If they preach it as they should, they preach it in subserviency to the gospel, not in opposition. He that knows how to distinguish well between the law and the gospel, let him bless God, and know that he deserves the name of a divine. We must preach it as a rule, not as a covenant of life. Holiness, as to the matter and substance of it, is the same it ever was. The gospel destroys not the law in this sense, but adds a strong enforcement to all its commands. Again, we must preach the law as the necessary means to drive souls out of themselves to Christ in the gospel. But sinners lie in their lusts, as fish in the mud, out of which there is no getting them, but by laying hard upon their consciences with the threatenings of the law. Rom. v. 20: 'Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound;' that is, in the conscience by conviction, not in life by commission. The law shews what sin is; I mean, it tells when we commit a sin, and what a hateful and dangerous thing we do in

Digitized by Google

committing of it: how we bring God, with all his strength against us. Now, this is necessary for the sinner's entertaining the gospel. The sharp point of the law must prick the conscience, before the creature can by the promises of the gospel be drawn to Christ. The field is not fit for the seed to be cast into it, till the plough hath broken it up; nor is the soul prepared to receive the mercy of the gospel, till broken with the terrors of the law.

SECTION II.—The gospel itself saves not, except it be made known. 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' 2 Cor. iv. 3. Where God sends no light, he intends no love. In bodily sickness, a physician may make a cure, though his patient knows not what the medicine is that he useth; but the soul must know its remedy, before he can have any healing benefit from it. In Luke i. 77, John is sent to give knowledge of salvation for the remission of sins:—no knowledge, no remission. Christ must be lifted up on the pole of the gospel, as well as on the tree of the cross, that, by an eye of faith, we may look on him, and so be healed, John iii. 14. 'Look unto me, and be ye saved,' Isa. xlv. 22. A man that sees may lead another that is blind to the place he would go; but he that would go to heaven, must have an eye in his own head to see his way, or he will never come there. 'The just shall live by his faith,' Hab. ii. 4, not by another's. Now, saving faith is a grace that sees its object; it is the 'evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1: that is, which are not seen by sense. 'I know whom I have believed,' 2 Tim. i. 12. Therefore faith is often set out by knowledge: 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent,' John xvii. 3. Now how can they know Christ, and life eternal, till the gospel be made known which bringeth him and life by him to light? 2 Tim. i. 10. And by whom shall the gospel be made known, if not by the ministers of it? Thus, Rom. x. 14: 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?' So that this great work lies at the minister's door; he is to make known the mystery of the gospel.

But what need now of preaching? This was the work of those that were to plant a church; now the church is planted, and the gospel made known, this labour may be spared. The ministry of the gospel was not intended only to plant a church, but to carry out its growth also. When Paul plants, Apollos comes after to water, 1 Cor. iii. 6. When the foundation is laid, must not the house be built? And this Christ gave ministers to his church for,—'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph. iv. 12. The scaffold is not taken down, till the building be finished, but rather to be raised higher and higher as the fabric goes up. Thus Paul went on in his ministry from lower points to higher, from foundation to superstructory truths, Heb. vi. 1. A famous church was planted at Thessalonica, but there was something lacking in their faith, which Paul longed to come and carry on to further perfection, 1 Thess. iii. 10. Surely, they that think there is so little need of preaching, forget that the gospel is a mystery, such a mystery as can never be fully taught by the minister, or learned by the people: neither do they consider how many engineers Satan hath at work continually to undermine the gospel, both as a mystery of faith and godliness also: hath not he his seedmen that are always scattering corrupt doctrine? Surely then the faithful minister had need obviate their designs by making known the truth, that his people may not want an antidote to fortify them against their poison. Are there not corruptions in the bosom of the best, and daily temptations from Satan and the world to draw these forth, whereby they are always in danger, and often sadly foiled? In a word, is not grace planted in a cold soil, that needs cherishing from the gospel ministry? Do we not see, that what is got in one sabbath by the preaching of the word, is much impaired by the next? Truly, our hearts are like lean ground, that needs ever and anon a shower, or else the corn withers and changeth its hue. O, what barren heaths would the most flourishing churches soon prove, if these clouds did not drop upon them! The Christians to whom Peter wrote, were of a high form, no novices, but well grounded and rooted in the faith; yet the apostle says, 2 Pet. i. 12, 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.'

Digitized by Google

SECTION III.—First, To the ministers. It reproves the vain-glorious preacher; who, instead of making known the mystery of the gospel, enters the pulpit to make himself known; who blows up his sermon with a windy pomp of words; and frames his discourse rather to tickle their ears, than to profit their souls; to send them home applauding the preacher for his wit, rather than admiring the excellences of Christ, and the riches of his grace. Thus many speak one word for Christ, and two for themselves. This is a great wickedness, which Paul solemnly clears himself of, 1 Thess. ii. 5, 6: 'Neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness; nor of men sought we glory.' O, how seldom are any converted by such sermons! These vain-glorious preachers may be like Rachel, fair, but their ministry is likely to be barren. Secondly, Abstruse preachers, who do not make the mysteries of the gospel known, but make truths, plain in themselves, mysterious, by their dark perplexed discourses upon them. What is said of some commentators,—that the places on which they treat were plain till they expounded them, may be said of some preachers, their text was clear till their obscure discourse upon it darkened it. What greater wrong can a preacher do his hearers than this? The preacher is to open scriptures, but these turn the key the wrong way, and lock them up from their knowledge. They are to hold up the gospel glass before their people, whereby they may see to dress their souls, like a bride against her husband's coming: but by that time that they have breathed on their text, it is so obscured that they cannot see their faces in it. That water is not the deepest that is thickest and muddy: nor the matter always the most profound, when the preacher's expression is dark and obscure. We count it a blemish in speech, when a man's pronounciation is not distinct: I know not how it should be thought a perfection, to be obscure in the delivery of our conceptions. The deeper the sculpture in the seal, the clearer the impression: the more fully any man understands a thing, the more able he will be to deliver it plainly to others. As a clipped speech comes from an impediment in the instrument of speech, so a dark and obscure delivery of our thoughts betrays a defect in our apprehensions, except it should come from an affectation of soaring high in our expressions above the reach of vulgar understandings; and this is worst of all. Thirdly, The mere moral preacher, the stream of whose preaching runs not in an evangelical channel. Moral duties he presseth, and sins against the moral law he exclaims against; neither dare I blame him for that; the Christian's creed doth not make void the ten commandments. One of the first sermons our Saviour preached was most of it spent in pressing moral duties, Matt. v. And never was there more need for this than in our days, in which Christianity hath been so wounded in its reputation by the moral dishonesty of many of its professors. But I level my reproof against them for this, that they do not preach the law evangelically, and make that the main design of their ministry, for which they received their commission, and that is, to make known the mystery of the gospel; to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ: 'And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ,' Ephes. iii. 8, 9. Surely, it is a foul blot upon their sermons and labours, who reveal little of Christ and the mystery of the gospel through the whole course of their ministry. The woe is pronounced not only against the indolent minister, but also against the minister who preacheth not the gospel,—'Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel,' 1 Cor. ix. 16. A lecture on ethics will not make thy people wise unto salvation. It were well if thou couldst preach thy drunken neighbour sober, and the riotous temperate; but this is no more than Plato did for his Polemo: this may make them men, that were before beasts; but thou must preach them out of themselves, as well as out of their flagitious practices: from the confidence of their righteousness, as well as from the love of their sins, or thou leavest them short of heaven. In a word, preach moral duties, but in an evangelical strain. Convince them they cannot do these without grace from Christ; for want of which the heathen's virtues were but gilded vices. We must come to good works by faith, and not to faith by good works. The tree must be good before the fruit can be so: 'Without me ye can do nothing.' Then convince them, when they are most exact in moral duties, this must not

Digitized by Google

be their righteousness before God: the robe which must cover their souls must not be the homespun garment of their own inherent righteousness wrought in them, but of Christ's righteousness which he wrought for them.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO FAITHFUL MINISTERS.

The gospel affords a word of sweet encouragement to the faithful ministers of Christ. Perhaps you have been long at work for Christ, and see little fruit of your labours; your strength is spent, and candle almost at the socket of old age: but your people are still carnal and obstinate, no sun will tan them,—no arguments will move them; to hell they will go, no gate can stop them; thou hast done thy utmost, but all in vain. This is sad indeed for them thus to go to hell by broad daylight: but thou hast cause of much inward peace and comfort, that thou hast done what God expects at thy hand: remember thy work is 'To make known the mystery of the gospel,' and upon their peril be it if they embrace it not. God never laid it upon thee to convert those he sends thee to: no, to publish the gospel is thy duty, to receive it is theirs. Abraham promiseth to discharge his servant of his oath, if the woman which he was to woo for his son would not follow him; and so will God clear thee of their blood, and lay it at their own door. 'If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness,—he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul,' Ezek. iii. 19. God judgeth not of his servants' work by the success of their labour, but by their faithfulness to deliver his message: 'Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eye of the Lord, Isa. xlix. 5. Secondly, To the people. As it is the minister's task to make known the mystery of the gospel in his pulpit, so is it your duty to do the same in your lives. The Christian's life should put his minister's sermon in print; he should preach that mystery every day to the eyes of his neighbours which the minister preacheth to their ears. As a well-drawn picture resembles the face from which it is taken, so should thy conversation resemble that gospel which thou professest: let none have cause to say, What hast thou to do with any sordid and impure practices, who pretendest to be instructed in this high and holy mystery? Thy Christian name ill agrees with a heathen life: if thou sufferest any that is not of thy profession to outstrip thee in any action that is virtuous and truly honourable, thou shamest thyself, and the gospel also. Thou art trained up in such high and heavenly learning as no other religion can shew, and therefore your lives are to bear proportion to your teaching. It was a sharp reproof to the Corinthians, when the apostle said, 'Ye walk as men,' 1 Cor. iii. 3; that is, men in a natural state: and he that walks thus like men, will not walk much unlike the very beasts; for man is become brutish in his understanding, and it is worse to live like a beast, than to be a beast. Surely, Christians, if you have not your name for nought, you partake of a nature higher than human; you should live as far above the carnal world, as grace is above nature, as heaven is above earth. Christ would never have stooped beneath angels, but to raise your hearts and lives above men: he never would have humbled himself to take the human nature, but on a design to make us partakers of the divine; nor would he have walked on earth, but to make a way to elevate our hearts to heaven. Say not, therefore, flesh and blood cannot bear such an injury, or forbear such a sensual pleasure: either thou art more than a man, or less than a Christian; flesh and blood never revealed the gospel to thee; flesh and blood never received Christ; in a word, flesh and blood shall never enter into the kingdom of God. If thou be a Christian, thou art baptized into the spirit of the gospel, thou hast a heaven-born nature, and that will enable thee to do more than flesh and blood can. Hast thou no desire to see others converted by the gospel? Wouldst thou steal to heaven alone, and carry none of thy neighbours with thee? Now, how shalt thou win them into a good opinion of the gospel, but by such an amiable life as may commend it to their consciences? It was a charge long ago laid upon Christianity, that it was better known in leaves of books than in the lives of Christians: hence it is, that many are hardened in their wickedness and prejudice against the gospel. Offend not those by scandals in thy life, whom thou wouldst have converted by the preaching of the gospel. Indeed the purity of Christians' lives

Digitized by Google

is the best attractive to win others to the love of religion. Had Christ's doves more sweet spices of humility, charity, patience, and other heavenly graces in their wings, as they fly about in the world, they would soon bring more company home with them. This is the gold that should over-lay the temple of Christ's church, and would make others in love with its beauty; this was one happy means for the incredible increase of converts in the primitive times. Then the mystery of the gospel was made known, not only by the apostles' powerful preaching, but by Christians' holy living. See how they walked, Acts ii. 46, and what was the blessed fruit of it, verse 47: 'They had favour with all the people, and the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved.' It would tempt any almost but a devil to have entered their names into such a heavenly society; but when this gold grew dim, then the gospel began to lose its credit in the world: converts came in slower, when those that professed the gospel began to cool in their zeal, and slacken in the strictness of their lives.

CHAPTER X.

BOLDNESS A DUTY IN A MINISTER.

THE third branch is how the minister is to make known this mystery of the gospel,—'That I may open my mouth boldly.'

SECTION I.—What is meant by opening his mouth boldly? The words import two things. First, To speak all that he hath in command from God to deliver; that is the full meaning of these words. Thus Paul kept nothing back of God's counsel, Acts xx. 27, 'He concealed not the words of the Holy One,' as Job's phrase is. Secondly, To speak with liberty and freedom of spirit, without fear of any, be they many or mighty. Now this is seen, first, by speaking openly and not in corners: the tricks of heretics and false teachers, who privily bring in their damnable doctrines. It is said, Christ 'spake that saying openly,' Mark viii. 32. Secondly, by speaking plainly. It shews some fear in the heart, when the preacher's words are so dark that his judgment or opinion cannot easily be gathered from his words, he lays them so close and ambiguous. The minister is to speak truth freely and plainly; this was the apostle's boldness, 2 Cor. iii. 12, 'Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.'

SECTION II.—Wherein the minister is to shew this boldness in preaching the gospel. First, In asserting the truths of the gospel. He is not to smother truth for the fear of any. Ministers are called witnesses; a witness is to speak what he knows, though it be in open court before the greatest of men. Paul had a free tongue to speak the truth, even in prison, though he was in bonds; yet he tells us, 'The word of God is not bound,' 2 Tim. ii. 9. Some truths will go down easily, to preach these requires no boldness; the worst in the congregation will give the preacher thanks upon some subjects; but there are displeasing truths, truths that cross the opinion of some in the assembly; to preach these, requires a free and bold spirit. When Christ was to preach before the Pharisees, he was not afraid to preach against their errors: had some wary preacher stood in his place, he would have selected such a subject as should not have offended their tender ears. There are truths that expose the preacher to scorn and derision: yet they are not to be concealed. Paul preached the resurrection, though some in the assembly mocked him for his pains. There are truths that sometimes may expose the minister to danger, truths that carry the cross at their back; such was that truth, that Isaiah delivered concerning the rejection of the Jews, Rom. x. 20, 'But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not.' This was likely to enrage his countrymen, and bring them about his ears. We read of a word of patience, which we are to keep: such a word the preacher had need have good store of that delivers it, and Christians that profess it, because it may bring them into trouble, and draw the persecutor's sword against them. This is not always the same: the word of patience in the apostle's time, were truths levelled against Judaism and Heathenism: under the Arian emperors, it was the Deity of Christ: in Luther's time the doctrine of Justification, and others asserted by him against the Romish Church. Secondly, Boldness in reproving sin, and denouncing judgment against

Digitized by Google

impenitent sinners. They are commanded to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and tell Jerusalem her sins. 'Preach the word,' saith St. Paul, 'be instant in season and out of season: reprove, rebuke with all long-suffering.' He must reprove, and continue therein, while they continue to sin. A minister without this boldness is like a smooth file, a knife without an edge, or a sentinel who is afraid to let off his gun when he should alarm the city upon a danger approaching. There is nothing more unworthy than to see a people bold to sin, and the minister afraid to reprove them. It is said of Tacitus, that he took the same liberty to write the emperors' lives, that they took in leading them. So should the minister, in reproving sin; not reprove the beggar, and spare the gentleman; not to censure the profane, and favour the professor. It was all one to Christ, whoever sinned should hear of it: the Scribes and Pharisees he paid to purpose; neither connived he at his own disciples, but rebuked them sharply: 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' said he to Peter;—'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' to his own mother, for her unseasonable importunity.

Section III.—What kind of boldness must the minister's be? First, A convincing boldness. How forcible are right words, saith Job; and how feeble are empty words, though shot with a thundering voice. Great words in reproving an error of sin, but weak arguments, produce laughter oftener than tears. Festus thought it unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not to signify the crimes laid against him, Acts xxv. 27: much more unreasonable is it, in the pulpit to condemn an error, and not prove it so;—to reprove a practice, and not convince of the evil of it. The apostle speaks of some 'whose mouths must be stopped,' Titus i. 11. They are convincing arguments that can stop the mouth. Empty reproofs will soon open wider the mouths of those that are reproved. The Spirit of God reproves by convincing; John xvi. 8, 'That when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin;' that is, he will convince; and so should the minister: this is to preach in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit. Secondly, A wise boldness. The minister is to reprove the sins of all, but to name none. Paul, being to preach before a lascivious and unrighteous prince, touched him to the quick, but did not name him in his sermon. Felix's conscience saved Paul that labour; he trembled, though Paul did not say he meant him. Thirdly, A meek boldness. 'The words of wise men are heard in quiet,' Eccles. ix. 17. Let the reproof be as sharp as thou wilt; but thy spirit must be meek. Passion raiseth the blood of him that is reproved; but compassion turns his bowels. We must not denounce wrath in wrath, lest sinners think we wish their misery; but rather with such tenderness, that they may see it is no pleasing work to us, but do it, that we might not, by a cruel silence be accessary to their ruin, which we desire to prevent. Jeremiah sounds the alarm of judgment, and tells them of a dismal calamity approaching; yet at the same time, appeals to God, and clears himself of all cruelty toward them; Jer. xvii. 16, 'I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee; neither have I desired the woeful day, thou knowest; that which came out of my lips was right before thee.' As if he had said, I have delivered my message in denouncing judgment; but with a mournful heart: I threatened ruin, but wished for peace. Thus Daniel dealt plainly with the king, but ushered in his hard message with an affectionate expression of his love and loyalty to him: 'My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies,' Dan. iv. 19. Fourthly, An humble boldness; such a boldness as is raised from a confidence in God, and not from ourselves, our own parts and ability, courage or stoutness. Paul is bold, and yet can tremble, and be in fear; bold, in confidence of God; 'We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention,' 1 Thess. ii. 2: but full of fear in the sense of his own weakness: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,' 1 Cor. ii. 3. Fifthly, A zealous boldness. Our reproofs of sin must come from a warm heart. Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city given to idolatry. Jeremiah tells us the word of God was a fire in his bones: it broke out of his mouth as the flame out of a furnace. The word is a hammer; but it breaks not the flinty heart when lightly laid on. King James said of a minister in his time, that he preached as if death were at his back. Ministers should set forth judgment as if it were at the sinner's back, ready to take hold of him. Cold reproofs or threatenings are like the rumblings

Digitized by Google

of thunder afar off, which affrights not as a clap over our head. I told you the minister's boldness must be meek and merciful; but not to prejudice zeal. The physician may sweeten his pill, to make his patient swallow it the better; but not to such a degree as to weaken the force of its operation.

SECTION IV.—Some helps to procure this boldness. First, A holy fear of God. We fear man so much, because we fear God so little. One fear cures another. When man's terror scares you, turn your thoughts to the wrath of God; this is the way Jeremiah was cured of his aguish distemper of man's fear: 'Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them,' chap. i. 17. If we must be broken in pieces (so is the original) better man do it than God. What man breaks in pieces, God can make whole again. 'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall save it,' Mark viii. 35. But if God break us in pieces, it is beyond the skill of man to gather the fragments, and re-make what God hath marred.

Secondly, Castle thyself within the power and promise of God for thy assistance and protection. He that is a coward in the open field, grows valiant when within strong walls and bulwarks. Jeremiah was laying down his arms, and flying from the face of those dangers to which his ministry to a rebellious people exposed him. Hear what course he had in his thoughts to take, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach to him, and a derision daily: 'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name,' Jer. xx. 9. Now, what kept him from this cowardly flight? 'But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one,' ver. 11. Now he takes heart, and goes on with his work undauntedly. Our eye, alas! is on our danger, but not on the invincible walls and bulwarks which God hath promised to set about us. The prophet's servant, that saw the enemy's army approaching, was in a panic: but the prophet, that saw the heavenly host for his life-guard about him, cared not a rush for them all. If God be not able to protect thee, why dost thou go on his errand at all? If thou believest he is, why art thou afraid to deliver it, when he is able to deliver thee?

Thirdly, Keep a clear conscience: he cannot be a bold reprover, that is not a conscientious liver; such a one must speak softly, for fear of waking his own guilty conscience. He is like one that shoots with a foul piece, his reproofs recoil upon himself. Unholiness in the preacher's life, either will stop his mouth from reproving, or the people's ears from receiving. O how harsh a sound does such a cracked bell make in the ears of his auditors! Every one desires, if he must be smitten, that it may be by the hand of the righteous, Psa. cxli. 5. Good counsel from a wicked man produces no effect. Our Saviour was fain to bid them hear the Pharisees, because their persons were a scandal to their doctrine, Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. Even those that are good, are too prone to turn their back on the ordinance, because of the scandal of him that officiates. This is their weakness and sin; but woe be to them at whose wickedness they stumble upon this temptation. It shews a man hath a very good appetite, that can eat his dinner out of a slovenly cook's hands; and he hath a very sound judgment and quick appetite to the word, that can make a hearty meal of it without any prejudice from the miscarriages of the preacher.

Fourthly, That which thou most fearest is best prevented by thy freedom and holy boldness in thy ministry. Is it danger to thy life? There is no such way to secure it, as by being faithful to him that hath the sole disposal of it. In whose hands art thou? Surely in God's; then it is thy best policy to keep him thy friend; for, when thy ways please him, he can make thy enemies to be at peace with thee. Man-pleasing is both endless and needless. If thou wouldst thou couldst not please all; and if thou couldst, there is no need, if thou pleasest him that can turn all their hearts and bind their hands. They speed best that dare be faithful. Jonah was afraid of his work: O, he durst not go to such a great city with such a sad message: to tell them that they should be destroyed, was to set them at work to destroy him that brought the news; but how near was he losing his life by running away to save it? Jeremiah seemed the only man likely to lose his life by his bold preaching; yet he had fairer quarter at last than the smooth preachers of his time. However, it is better to die honourably than live shamefully. Is it thy name thou art tender of? If thou art free and bold, the word thou deliverest will be a reproach and daily derision to

Digitized by Google

thee, as it was once to Jeremiah. Thou mayest, indeed, be mocked by some, but thou wilt be reverenced by more: yea, even they that wag their heads at thee, carry that in their conscience which will make them fear thee: they are the flattering preachers who become base among the people, Mal. ii. 9.

Fifthly, Consider, if thou be not now bold for Christ in thy ministry, thou canst not be bold before Christ at his judgment; he that is afraid to speak for Christ, will certainly be ashamed to look on his face then. 'We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' &c., 2 Cor. v. 10. Now what use doth Paul make of this solemn meditation? 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,' ver. 11. It is not wisdom to provoke the judge, by flattering the prisoner. A serious thought of that day, as we are going to preach, would make us shut all base fear out of the pulpit. It is a very small thing to be judged by man now for our boldness, but dismal to be condemned by Christ for our cowardice. This is man's judgment-day, as Paul calls it, 1 Cor. iv. 3. Every one dares tax the preacher, and pass his sentence upon him, if he pleaseth not his itching ear; but Christ will have his judgment-day also, to judge them, who now take upon them to judge others, and his sentence will easily reverse theirs; yea, even those that now condemn thy freedom to reprove, would be the first to accuse thee for thy sinful silence. Some at the last day may accuse their cowardly ministers, and say, that if they had told them of their danger, they had not run into it; if they had been bold to reprove their sin, they had not been so impudent as to live in the practice of it, which now hath brought them to everlasting shame and misery.

Sixthly, Consider how bold Christ was in his ministry; his very enemies were forced to give him this testimony; 'We know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly,' Luke xx. 21. He spared not the proudest of them, but to their head reproved them, and denounced the judgment of God against them. When in the midst of his enemies, he was not daunted with their high looks or furious threats, but owned that very truth, which they made his capital crime, Matt. xxvii. 11, John xviii. 37. Hence Paul saith, that he witnessed a good confession, before Pontius Pilate, 1 Tim. vi. 13; and useth this as the most powerful argument to conjure Timothy to be faithful in his ministry. What greater incentive to valour can the soldier have, than to see his general before him with undaunted courage where the bullets fly thickest? It is impossible we should be dastardly, if instructed by Christ, and actuated with his spirit. When the high-priest and elders saw the boldness of Peter and John, they soon knew where they had got this heroic spirit; for it is said, 'They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus,' Acts iv. 13.

Seventhly, Pray, and beg prayers for this holy boldness. Thus did the apostles come by it; their boldness was not the product of any natural greatness of spirit they had above others (you see what stout soldiers they were in themselves, by their poor-spirited behaviour when Christ was taken,—they all ran away in a fright, and left him to shift for himself), but it was the child of prayer not bred in them, but granted from heaven unto them at their humble suit; see them praying hard for it; Acts iv. 29, 'Now, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word.' Mark, they do not pray against suffering, but for boldness to preach, whatever it may cost them. They desire not to be excused the battle, but to be armed with courage to stand in it; they had rather be lifted above the fear of suffering, than have an immunity from suffering; let God but give them boldness to do their duty, and they have enough. Now see how soon God answers their prayers; ver. 31, 'And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.' The grace they desired, dropped into their bosom, in a greater measure than ever they had it. If this be thy sincere request, God will not deny it. See them also sending others to God upon this errand for them, Col. iv. 3, and here in the text. The minister hath a difficult duty to perform; but it is a necessary one, both for him and the people: he cannot be a faithful minister, that dares not deliver all his message. When Mauritius, the emperor, had inquired Phocas's disposition, he said, If he be timorous, he is a murderer. He that fears his people's faces is the man that is

Digitized by Google

the most likely to murder their souls; so that you pray for yourselves, while you endeavour to pray down this gift upon your minister.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MINISTER'S DIGNITY AND DUTY SHEWN.

THE last general head in the words, is the argument with which the apostle backs his request, the more effectually to provoke them to the remembrance of him in their prayers; and it is double: first from his office,—'For which I am an ambassador:' the second, from his present afflicted state,—'An ambassador in bonds.' First, His office. Ambassadors being messengers of state, sent abroad by princes about the great affairs of their kingdom, it behoves all good subjects to wish them success in their embassy. Upon this account Paul being sent from the great God on an embassy, as the apostle of the Gentiles, desires the church's prayers for a happy success to his message.

SECTION I.—Ministers of the gospel are God's ambassadors. The apostle does not monopolize this title, as if none were so besides himself; for elsewhere he reads others in the commission,—'We are ambassadors for Christ,' 2 Cor. v. 20; that is, we apostles, who are now upon the place, and in the employment of the gospel, and such also as shall be dispatched after us to the end of the world upon the same errand. The authority of the apostle's extraordinary commission, and that which ordinary ministers after them have, is the same for substance; only they had their mission immediately from Christ's mouth, and were œcumenical, whereas ordinary ministers receive it from the church by an authority derived from Christ, and are to lie as ambassadors in some one place, whither they are sent. In handling this point, we shall observe three particulars: First, Why are ministers called ambassadors; and that is, First, To set out the dignity. Secondly, To shew the duty of their function.

First, The dignity. God by this title would procure an honourable esteem of the ministers' calling in the hearts of all those to whom they are sent; this is more necessary to the good success of their message than is generally thought. I know very well that what ministers say on this subject, is thought to have something in it of kindness to themselves rather than of friendship to the gospel. Men are prone to interpret it as a fruit of their pride, and an affectation they have of some outward grandeur, and worldly pomp, which they design to gain by such a magnificent title; the apostle himself was sensible of this, and therefore, 1 Cor. iv., when in the first verse he had called for that respect which was due to the minister's function,—'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God;' he gives a caveat, ver. 5, that they would 'judge nothing before the time,' until the Lord come.' Then shall it be known from what spirit it is that we magnify our office, and have been actuated by in our function; and by what spirit they are moved, who vilify and despise both it and our persons, for our calling's sake.

SECTION II.—Now the dignity of gospel ambassadors will appear in three things. First, The majesty of the prince from whom they come. Ambassadors have their respect according to the rank of their master that sends them; the greater the prince, the more honourable is his messenger. Now the ministers of the gospel come from the great God, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, by whom they reign, and of whom they hold all their principalities; this is their master, in whose name they come; therefore Moses, when he was to deliver his message to Israel, bids them ascribe greatness to that God, whose name and will he was to publish, Deut. xxxii. 3. The potentates of the world have found, to their cost, how deeply God thinks himself concerned in the affronts that are done to his servants. What brought Israel's flourishing kingdom to ruin, but their mocking his messengers, and ill-using his prophets? 'The wrath of the Lord arose against his people till there was no remedy,' 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. We cannot despise the messenger, and honour his master that sends him, Luke x. 16. Few are so bold as to say with that proud king, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' Exod. v. 2. But too many dare say, Who is the minister, that I should obey his message, repent at his summons, tremble at the words he delivers? Forgetting, alas! that they have God's authority for what

Digitized by Google

they say: so, by a slanting blow, they hit God himself in contemning his ambassador. Secondly, The greatness of the person, whose place the minister supplies. Ministers are but deputy ambassadors; Christ himself had the first patent, called therefore the Messenger of the Covenant, Mal. iii. 1; and the Apostle of our profession, Heb. iii. 1. From him the ministers receive their authority: 'All power is given unto me,—Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, Matt. xxviii. 18. 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God,' 2 Cor. v. 20. As if the apostle had said, We do but deliver that message which Christ should and would have done, had he not been called to heaven about the affairs of his church, and therefore hath left us as his deputies to carry on that ministry which himself began when he was here below. Now, what an honour is it for a poor creature to stand up in Christ's room, and bring that message to poor sinners which was first committed unto him! Thirdly, The excellency of the message they bring. There are three kinds of embassies, which particularly demand the honourable entertainment of the messengers who bring them to any state.

SECTION III.—First, Embassies for peace. Beautiful are their feet, and honoured are their persons, that bring glad tidings of peace along with them; especially when these four things concur in their embassage, which will be all found in the minister's negotiation. First, When an ambassador comes from some puissant prince, whose power is formidable, and whose armies are irresistible: an ambassador from such a prince to a people naked and unarmed, for peace and amity, O, how welcome is his approach! Such a king we come from; he offers not peace because he cannot maintain war, or stands in need of our friendship. Sinners need his favour, but he fears not their hostility; never could they shoot any of their arrows so high as heaven, but all have come down upon their own heads. What can he expect that spits against the wind, but to have it blown back upon his own face? and he that fights with God, but expect to have his weapons beat back to his own head? Worldly princes treat when they cannot fight: think not so of God; his instruments of death are ready, there is no place where he hath not his armed troops able to subdue his proudest enemies. There is no creature so little, but contains an army in it large enough to tame the proudest king in the world. The worm under Herod's foot, at God's command, shall seize on him, and eat out his heart. O, with what fear and trembling should the ambassadors of this God be received! When Samuel came to Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, 'Comest thou peaceably?' 1 Sam. xvi. 4. Secondly, When such a puissant prince sends his ambassador to offer peace to a people that have already felt the impressions of his power, and are pining under the bleeding miseries which their war have brought upon them, O how would they run to open their city-gates to him! as willingly, surely, as Noah opened the window to receive the dove that brought the olive branch after that dismal flood. This is the deplorable state which the ministry of the gospel finds mankind involved in. What a forlorn condition hath our war with Heaven brought us into! Do we not feel the arrows of Divine vengeance sticking in our very hearts and consciences?—the curse of God cleaving to every faculty of our souls, and member of our bodies? Are not all the creatures in arms against us? And doth not hell from beneath open its devouring mouth upon us, ready to swallow us up in everlasting destruction? And yet are we so stout, that we can find no lodging in our town for his ambassadors but a prison?—no entertainment to the offers of peace they make, but contempt and scorn? Thirdly, When the terms of peace which the ambassador brings are honourable. Gold, we say, may be bought too dear, and so may the peace of one state with another. As when Nahash, the Ammonite, offered peace with the men of Jabash Gilead, but upon condition that they should have every one his right eye thrust out, to lay it as a reproach on Israel, and therefore was rejected with just indignation; they resolving rather to die with honour than live with shame. It is the custom among many of this world's princes to make their demands according to the length of their sword; where their power is great, it is hard to have peace on easy terms. Now, this, one would think, should make the ministers of the gospel and their message infinitely welcome to poor sinners, that though they come from the great God, who may make his own demands, and might not only require the eye out of our

Digitized by Google

head, but force the very heart out of our body, yet offers peace on such gracious terms, there being nothing in the whole instrument of peace provided for himself, but the securing of his own glory in our salvation. See a little of his terms. He offers to seal an act of oblivion, wherein all wrongs done to his crown and dignity in the time of our hostility against him shall be forgiven, and forgotten; so runs the promise,—'He will forgive them their iniquities, and remember them no more.' He will not only forgive what is past, but receive our persons into favour for the future. 'By whom also we have access by faith into this grace' (or favour) 'wherein we stand,' Rom. v. 2. Yea, he promiseth to restore the sinner to all that was forfeited by his rebellion, to take off the whole curse which befell him for his rebellion, and restore him to his primitive dignity; he gives sinners power to become his children, John i. 12; and, as his children, makes them his heirs, and that not to a *Cabul* here below only, but to heaven itself, an inheritance in light, beyond all expression glorious; for 'godliness hath the promise of this life, and that which is to come.' Now, let us see what he expects at the sinner's hand; not to purchase his favour with a ransom out of his own purse; no, he empties his Son's veins to pay that: but he requires us, first, to lay down the weapons of our rebellion: secondly, to accept our pardon and peace at the hands of free grace, attributing the glory of it to the mere mercy of God as the moving, and Christ's satisfactory obedience as the meritorious, cause: thirdly, that we shall swear allegiance to him for the future. How reasonable these are, those that now reject them shall confess with infinite shame and horror for their folly, when Christ shall send them to hell by his irrevocable sentence. Lastly, When in all this a prince is sincere in the offers of peace, and gives full security for the performance of what he promiseth, this must needs make the ambassador that brings them still the more welcome. Treaties of peace among men are too often used but as a handsome blind for war; they intend least what they pretend most. But when an ambassador comes enabled to give full security against all fear and jealousies that may arise in the breasts of those he treats with, this gives a value to all the rest. Now the great God hath wonderfully condescended to satisfy the querulous hearts of poor sinners; guilt hath made man suspicious of God; his own unfaithfulness to God makes him jealous of God's faithfulness unto him. Could Satan make Eve so soon question the truth of God's promise? He saith but, 'Has God said, Ye shall not die?' and she is presently shaken out of her faith in her maker, to believe her destroyer. O, how easy then is it for him to nourish those suspicions which naturally breed now in our unbelieving hearts! How often are we putting it to the question, Will God forgive so great, so many sins? May I venture to believe? Now God gives his ambassadors instructions from his word to satisfy all the scruples which he injects, or which may arise from our own misgiving hearts. The whole Scripture aims at removing our doubts, and assures us of the mercy of God. Something like this,—'Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope,' Rom. xv. 4. There are many expedients men use to satisfy the minds of those they deal with concerning the truth of their promises, and certainty of their performing them: sometimes they ratify them with their seal. Thus God gives the broad seal of the sacraments, and privy seal of his Spirit, to assure the believer he will perform all he hath promised in his word. Sometimes witnesses are called in for farther security of the conveyance. Thus in the purchase Jeremiah made of his kinsman's field, he took witnesses to the bargain, Jer. xxxii. 10. There are witnesses, both in heaven and earth, ready to avouch the truth of what God promiseth, and all agree in their verdict, 1 John v. 7, 8. If all this will not do, then an oath is taken, and this generally puts an end to all controversies. To this also doth God graciously condescend; not that God's promise needs the suretiship of his oath to make it surer; for it is as impossible God should lie when he promiseth, as when he swears; but to make our faith stronger, which needs such supporters as these to stay and strengthen it; as is hinted in that sweet place, Heb. vi. 17, 18, from which one flower the sincere believer may suck honey enough to live comfortably upon in the hardest, longest winter of affliction that can befall him: 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of

Digitized by Google

his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation,' &c. Now, the greater security God enables his ambassadors to offer poor sinners for the salvation they preach in his name, the more prodigiously provoking is their unbelief and impenitency who reject it. When Titus Vespasian came into Jerusalem, and saw the unspeakable miseries which the besieged had endured from those three sore plagues, sword, pestilence, and famine, which had so long raged among them, it is said that he broke out into these words: 'I am not guilty of all this blood which hath been shed, nor of the miseries this people have endured; they, by their obstinacy, have brought it upon their own heads.' O, how much more may the ambassadors of Christ wash their hands over the heads of impenitent sinners, to whom they have so often proclaimed pardon and peace in God's name, and say, We are free from your blood; it is your own obstinacy and desperate impenitency which hath undone your precious souls.

SECTION IV.—Secondly, Such as come to offer an alliance by marriage between one state and another. This is one great part of the ministers' embassy: they are sent to let the world know what good-will the God of heaven bears to poor sinners; that he can be content to bestow his only Son and her in marriage upon them, if they also like the match; nay, more, both Father and Son do earnestly desire it; it is a match which God himself first thought on for his Son: it sprang from the counsel of his own will, and when this great intendment was transacted between Father and Son, (as it was before the foundation of the world,) the Son declared his approval of it to his Father; yea, expressed the dear affection he bore to mankind; for then it was that he rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men. In pursuance of which, when the fulness of time was come, he took his progress from heaven to earth, that, by marrying our nature, he might enter into a near alliance with the persons of believers. This is the match God's ambassadors come to negotiate: and the Scriptures are their credential letters, which confirm, under God's own hand and seal, the truth of all they offer in his name. There you have the picture of this heavenly Prince they woo thy affections for, drawn to the life, in his glory, love, and loveliness; that, by knowing him, you may the better take a liking to his person. There are the rich bracelets of the promises, which his messengers are, in his name, to deliver to those willing souls that shall declare their consent to take him for their Lord and Husband; yea, they have authority to pronounce the contract, and to promise marriage in Christ's name, which at the great day he will perform unto them: 'I have espoused you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ,' 2 Cor. xi. 2. Stand here and adore, ye children of men, this low stoop of the Divine Majesty! O, that ever it should enter into the heart of the great God to unite his Son unto his creature! and that not of the noblest house among them, for he took not upon him the nature of angels, but of man; not in its primitive state, but when it was lapsed and degraded of its primitive glory. For a high-born prince to take a poor damsel out of the beggar's row, were not so strange as to take her from the jail or bar, where she is condemned for treason against his royal person; yet this is the very case,—the Lord offers to lift up the head of his rebel creature out of prison, where it lies under a sentence of death for treason against his crown and dignity, to take him into his bed and bosom. Truly, I know not at which most to wonder, whether the mercy of God in making love to us, or our pride and folly, which are so coy and hard to be persuaded to entertain the motion. Though Abigail confessed herself unworthy to be David's wife, yet she was too wise to stand in her own light by letting such an opportunity escape for her preferment: therefore it is said, 'She made haste to go with David's servants.' But, alas! how do we either broadly refuse, or foolishly make excuse, and hold God's messengers in suspense from day to day!

SECTION V.—Thirdly, Such as come with embassies for commerce and trade. Suppose a prince had in his kingdom such rich commodities as could not be found elsewhere, and without which the neighbouring nation could not exist; if this prince should send an ambassador to this people, and offer them a free trade, that they might come as often as they pleased, and take of the good things of his land, how joyfully would such an embassy be embraced! Man's happiness

Digitized by Google

on earth lies in a free trade with heaven. This world is a barren place; nothing is here to be had that an immortal soul can live upon, or find satisfaction from. In heaven alone is to be found what it needs; the food it must live on, the clothes it must wear, are both of the growth of that country. Man's first sin spoiled all his trade with heaven. No sooner did Adam rebel, but a war commenced, and all trade with him was forbidden; therefore in our natural state we are said to be 'afar off,' and 'without God in the world.' The sad effects of this loss are to be seen in the forlorn condition of man's soul, which was once so gloriously arrayed with righteousness and holiness, but now naked, not having a rag to cover its shame withal. Now, God sends his ambassadors to offer peace, and with it liberty to return to its first communion with him: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price.' He invites men to turn merchants with heaven,—'Come ye to the waters;' by which phrase the gospel is compared to a port-town, or its quay-side, to which the crier calls people to repair, and buy commodities that are there landed. Here it is that God sets forth the riches of his grace to view and sale, without money and without price. That must needs be a gainful trade which brings in rich treasure without much cost: here is all the riches of heaven to be had, and no money required for the purchase. Can you hear of this pearl of great price, and not turn merchants for it? or can your souls be maintained by your peddling worldly trade? O, why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? It is not necessary you should be rich in the world, but it is necessary you should have Christ and his grace. In all your pains and travail for the things of this world, your are but adventurers, it is a hazard whether you get them. There is no certain method can be learned for growing rich in the world; there are some poor as well as rich of every trade; but in this trade for Christ and his grace, there is an office erected to insure all your adventure: 'His soul shall live that seeks the Lord;' 'He that hungers after righteousness shall be satisfied.'

Secondly, Ministers are called ambassadors in regard of their duty as well as dignity. Places of honour are places of trust and service. Many like well enough to hear of the minister's dignity; like Diotrephes, they love pre-eminence, but would willingly be excused the labour that attends it. None have a greater trust deposited in their hands than the minister. It is a weight that made the apostle tremble under it: 'I was among you with much fear and trembling.' To them is committed the word of reconciliation, 2 Cor. v. 19. If the treaty of peace between God and sinners doth not succeed, the ambassador is sure to be called to an account how he discharged his duty.

CHAPTER XII.

WHY GOD SENDS AMBASSADORS; AND WHY HE USETH MEN, NOT ANGELS.

The second thing is to give an account why God sends ambassadors to his poor creatures.

First, Negatively. Not because he needs man's good-will. Earthly princes' affairs require they should hold a correspondence with their neighbours; therefore they send ambassadors to procure peace, or preserve amity; but God can defend his crown without the help of allies. Secondly, Not because he was bound to do it. There is a law of nations, yea, of nature, that obliges princes, before they commence a war, to offer peace. But the great God cannot be bound, except he bind himself. When Adam sinned, God was free to make a new league with man, or take vengeance on him for breaking his faith in the first.

But, affirmatively. No other account can be given of this but the good-will and free-grace of God. When Christ (who is the chief ambassador) landed first on earth, see what brought him,—Luke i. 78: 'Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us.' Tender mercy indeed! for the life of man lay under God's foot, at his pure mercy: he was no more bound to treat with his creature, than a prince with a traitor legally condemned. Wherever God's ambassadors come, they come on mercy's errand, —'The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up

Digitized by Google

betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people,' 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.

But if God will treat with his poor creatures, why by ambassadors, and not by himself immediately? This is the fruit of Divine indulgence: sin hath made the presence of God dreadful; man cannot now well bear it. What a fright was Adam put into when he heard but the voice of God, walking toward him in the garden, and not furiously rushing upon him! The Jews had the trial of this, Exod. xx. 18; they soon had enough of God's presence, and therefore came to Moses, saying, 'Speak thou with us,—but let not God speak with us, lest we die,' ver. 19.

But if God will use ambassadors, why not employ some glorious angel from heaven, rather than weak and frail man? The apostle gives the reason, 2 Cor. iv. 7: 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us;' or, as in the original, 'in vessels of a shell.' As the precious pearl is found in a shell, so this precious treasure of the gospel shall be found in frail men, that the excellency of the work may be of God. The more contemptable the instrument, the more glorious appears God's power in using it for so high and noble an end. To see a man wound another with a sword, would carry no wonder; but to wound him with a feather would appear to be a miracle: to see men fall down and tremble when an angel (a creature of such might and glory) is the speaker, is no great wonder: but to behold a Felix quivering on the bench, while a man, and he a poor prisoner, at the bar, preacheth to his judge, this carries a double wonder:

First, That so poor a creature as Paul was, and in the condition of a prisoner, durst be so bold; and also that so great a person as Felix was, should be smitten with his word as if some thunderbolt had struck him. Who will not adore the power of a God in the weakness of the instrument? Had God employed angels in this business, we should have been in danger of ascribing the efficacy of the work to the gifts and abilities of the instrument, and of giving credit to the message, for the messenger's sake, he being so honourable; but now God sending weak creatures like ourselves, when anything is done by them, we are forced to say, it is the Lord's doing, not the instrument's. What reason God had in adopting this plan to guard his own glory, we see by our proneness to idolize the gifts of men, where they are more eminent than others. What would we have done, if angels had been the messengers? Truly, it would have been hard to have kept us from worshipping them, as we see John himself had done, if he had not been kept back by the angel's seasonable remonstrance, Rev. xix. 10.

Secondly, Ministers being men, have an advantage many ways above angels for the work. First, As they are more nearly concerned in the message they bring, so that they cannot deceive others without injuring themselves. What greater argument for a man's care than his own interest? Surely the pilot will look how he steers the ship, that hath share in the freight. Secondly, Their affections are alike, arising from the sense of those very temptations in themselves, which their brethren labour under. This an angel could not have and by this they are able to speak more feelingly to the condition of other men, than an angel could do. So that which man wants of the angel's rhetoric, is recompensed with his natural affection and sympathy, flowing from experience. He knows what a troubled conscience is in another, by having felt it throb in his own bosom; as God told his people, having been themselves sojourners in Egypt,—'You know the heart of a stranger.' And who will treat poor souls with more mercy than they who know they need it themselves? Thirdly, The sufferings which ministers meet with for the gospel's sake, are of great advantage to their brethren. Had angels been the ambassadors, they could not have sealed the truth of the doctrine they preached with their blood. Paul's bonds were much talked of at court, and in the country also, Phil. i. 14: 'Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.' Angels might have sounded the trumpet of the gospel with a shriller voice; but men alone have pitchers to break (I mean frail bodies) by suffering for the gospel, whereby the glory of its truth (like the lamp in Gideon's soldier's hand) shines forth upon the eyes of their greatest enemies, to the confusion of their faces, and amazement of their hearts.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII..

AN EXHORTATION TO HEARKEN TO GOD'S AMBASSADORS.

ARE ministers ambassadors? This shews the gospel ministry to be an office peculiar to some, not a work common to all. An ambassador, we know, is one that hath his commission and credential letters from his prince to shew for his employment; it is not a man's skill in state affairs that makes him an ambassador, nor ability in the law that makes a man a magistrate, but their call to these places; neither do gifts make a man a minister, but his mission; 'How can they preach, except they be sent?' The rules which the Spirit of God gave about the minister's admission into his function, were all to no purpose, if it lay open to every man's own choice to make him a preacher: 'Lay hands suddenly on no man,' 1 Tim. v. 22: that is, admit none to the ministry without good proof and trial; but why should any be set apart for that which every one may do?

SECTION I.—First, An exhortation to the people. Be persuaded, in the fear of God, to hearken to the message these ambassadors bring. What mean you to do in the business they come to treat about? Will you be friends with God, or not?—take Christ by faith into your embraces, or resolve to have none of him? We are but ambassadors, back again we must go to our Master that sent us, and give an account what has become of our negotiation. Shall we go and say, Lord, we have been with the men thou sent us to, and thy message was delivered by us according to our instructions; we told them that ruin and damnation would come upon them, if they did not repent and turn; we laid both life and death before them, and spared not to reveal the whole counsel of God; but they believed not a word we spake; we were to them as those that mocked, or told what we had dreamed in the night, and not the words of truth and faithfulness. God forbid, that this should be the report which at their return they make to God of their negotiation! But the more to affect you with the importance of their message, consider, First, The wonderful love of God in sending you these ambassadors. 'It is not a prince that sends to one of his own rank, but a God to his rebel creature, against whom he might have sent an army of judgments to destroy him: it is not against rebels that are intrenched in some place of strength, or in the field with a force wherewith you are able to resist his power; but to his prisoners, fettered and manacled, to you that have your traitorous heads on the block: it is not any need that he hath of your life that makes him desire your salvation. A prince sometimes saves his rebellious subjects, because he needs their hands to fight for him, and weakens himself by shedding their blood; but God can ruin you, and not wrong himself; if you perish, it is without his damage. Luke vii. 30, the Pharisees are said to reject the counsel of God against themselves.

SECTION II.—Secondly, Consider what an intolerable affront is given to the Majesty of heaven by rejecting his grace. Princes' requests are commands: who dare deny a king what he asks? And darest thou stand against thy Maker? It is charged upon no less than a king, as an act of insufferable pride, 'that he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord,' 2 Chron. xxxvi. 12. But what! must a king come down from his throne, and humble himself before a poor prophet, that was his own subject? Yes, when he represents the person of that King, to whom he was himself a subject: God will have him tremble and bow, not to Jeremiah, but to 'Jeremiah speaking from the mouth of the Lord.' O, consider this, ye that think it childish and simple to weep at a sermon, to humble yourselves at the reproof of a minister: your carriage under the word preached declares what your thoughts of God himself are. When Nahash slighted David's ambassadors, and abused them, the king took the scorn upon himself. 'I will publish the name of the Lord,' saith Moses: 'ascribe ye greatness unto our God,' Deut. xxxii. 3. How should they ascribe greatness to God while Moses is preaching to them? Surely he means by their humble attendance on, and ready obedience to, the word he delivered in God's name. Thirdly, Consider how much the heart of God is engaged in the message his ambassadors bring. When a prince sends an ambassador about a negotiation,

Digitized by Google

the success of which he passionately desires, and from which he promiseth himself much honour, and he meets with opposition, he is greatly provoked. There is nothing that God sets his heart more upon than the exaltation of Christ, and his grace through him, in the salvation of poor sinners: this therefore is called his counsel, Heb. vi. 17; 'The pleasure of the Lord,' Isa. liii. 10. Abraham's servant knew how much his master desired a wife for his son and heir from among his kindred, and therefore presseth Laban with this, as the weightiest argument of all others,—'If ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; if not, tell me:' as if he had said, By this, the truth of your love to my master will be seen. So here, if ye will indeed deal kindly with God, tell his ambassadors so, by your complying with them in that which he so affectionately desires. This the Lord Jesus, when on earth, called his Father's business, which must be done whatever comes on it, Luke ii. 49: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' He knew he had never come hither but for the dispatch of this, and could not look his Father in the face when he went back, except this was finished; therefore as this went on, and the work of the gospel made progress, or met with any stoppage in the hearts of men, he mourned or rejoiced; when it was rejected, we find him grieved for the hardness of their hearts. When his disciples made report how victoriously the chariot of the gospel ran, 'In that hour he rejoiced in spirit,' Luke x. 21. When he was taking his leave of the world, his thoughts were at work how the gospel should be carried on, and the salvation of souls suffer no prejudice by his departure; he therefore empowered his apostles for the work: 'All power is given me; go, preach the gospel to all nations.' Yea, now in heaven, he is waiting for the success of it, and listening how his servants succeed in their errand. Now, what a prodigious sin is it, by thy impenitency to withstand God in his main design! Do you indeed deal kindly with our Master, whose embassy we bring?

SECTION III.—Fourthly, Consider the weight and importance of the message these ambassadors bring unto you. It is not a slight errand we come about. 'I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil,' Deut. xxx. 15. 'Hear, and your souls shall live,' Isa. lv. 3. 'He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him,' John iii. 36. We come not to entice you with the favour of an earthly prince, who may promise honours to-day, and lose his own crown to-morrow. We bait not our hook with the world's treasures or pleasures, but bring you news of a heaven that shall as surely be yours, as you are now on earth, if you accept the offer. We scare you not with the displeasure of a mortal man, whose breath is in his nostrils; nor with the momentary torment of rack or gibbet, which continue hardly long enough to be felt; but with the never-dying wrath of the ever-living God; and what we either promise or threaten in God's name, he stands ready and resolved to perform; he 'confirmeth the word of his servants, and performeth the counsel of his messengers,' Isa. xliv. 26. Fifthly, Consider on what terms the gospel and its messengers stay among you. There is a time when God calls his ambassadors home, and will treat no longer with a people, and that must needs be a sad day; for when they go, then judgments and plagues come: if the treaty ends, it will not be long before the war begins. Elisha died,—and the bands of the Moabites invaded the land,' 2 Kings xiii. 20. The prophet once gone, then the enemy comes: the angel plucks Lot out of Sodom, and how long had they fair weather after? The Jews put away the gospel from them by their impenitency, which made the apostles turn to the Gentiles, Acts xiii. 46. But did they not thereby call for their own ruin and destruction, which presently came flying on the Roman eagle's wings to them? They judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and God thought them unworthy also to have a temporal. If once God calls home his ambassadors, it is no easy matter to bring them back, and the treaty set on foot again. God can least endure to be slighted in that which he makes account of as one of the highest ways he can express his favour to a people; better no ambassadors had come, than to come and go without effecting what they came for: 'They shall know,' saith God, 'that there hath been a prophet among them,' Ezek. ii. 5; that is, they shall know it to their cost; God will be paid for his ministers' pains. Ministers die, or are removed from their people, and glad they are to get rid of them; but they have not done with them, till they have reckoned with God for them.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, To the ministers of the gospel. You see, brethren, your calling; let it be your care to comport with this your honourable employment.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW MINISTERS SHOULD DO THE DUTY OF AMBASSADORS.

STAIN not the dignity of your office by any base unworthy practices. O lay not the dignity of your function in the dirt by any sordid, unholy actions! Paul magnified his office; do not you do that which should make others vilify and debase it: that which makes others bad, will make you worse: 'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' John vi. 70. You are called angels, but if wicked, you become devils. We read of a 'prophet's reward,' Matt. x. 41, which amounts to more than a private disciple's; and do you not think there will be a prophet's punishment in hell, as well as reward in heaven? One saith, If any were born without original sin, it should be the minister; if any could live without actual sin, it should be the minister; if there were such a thing as a venial sin, it should be in the minister: they are more the servants of God than others, should not they then be more holy than others? Art thou fit to be an ambassador who art not a good subject—to be a minister who art not a good Christian? Secondly, Keep close to thy instructions. Ambassadors are bound up by their commission what they are to say; be sure, therefore, to take thy errand right before thou ascendest the pulpit to deliver it. I have received of the Lord that which I delivered to you.' God says to the prophet,—'Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me,' Ezek. iii. 17. It must be from him, or it is not right. Take heed thou dost not set the royal stamp upon thy own base metal. Come not to thy people with, 'Thus saith the Lord,' when it is the divination of thy own brain. There is no lie so base as that which is told in the pulpit; and as thou must not speak what he never gave thee in commission, so thou must not conceal what thou hast in command to deliver. It is as dangerous to blot out, as put in anything to our message. Job comforted himself with this, that he had 'not concealed the words of the Holy One,' chap. vi. 10. And Paul from this washeth his hands from the blood of all,—'I am pure from the blood of all men; for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God,' Acts xx. 26, 27. Pray observe, he doth not say he had declared all the counsel of God; no, who can, but God himself? The same apostle saith, 'We prophesy but in part.' There are in the Scriptures mysteries that were never yet fully discovered; we cannot declare all, who know not all. But he saith, 'He shunned not to declare all.' When he met a truth, he did not step back to shun it. The holy apostle was not afraid to speak what he knew to be the mind of God; as he had it from God, so should they from him; he did not keep back in his preaching what was profitable for them to know. Caleb (one of the spies sent to Canaan) could not give them a full account of every particular place in the land, but he made the best observation he could, and then brought Moses word again, 'as it was in his heart,' Josh. xiv. 7; while others basely concealed what they knew, because they had no mind to the journey; and this gained him the testimony from God's own mouth, to be a man that followed him fully, Numb. xiv. 24. So he that doth his utmost to search the Scripture, and then brings word to the people, as it is in his heart, preaching what he hath learnt from it, without garbling his conscience, and detaining what he knows, for fear or favour, this is the man that fulfils his ministry, and shall have the eulogium of a faithful servant. Thirdly, Think it not enough that thou deliverest thy message from God, but show a zeal for thy Master. Should an ambassador, after finding his errand coolly received, give himself up to the pleasures of the court where he is resident, and not much care how his master's business succeeds, it could not be said that he had done his duty as a faithful servant; no, his head and heart must be both at work, to put life into the business, and bring it to the desired issue. Abraham's servant would neither eat nor drink till he saw which way his message worked, and how they would deal with his master. Thus should ministers let those they are sent to see that they are in earnest, and that their hearts are deeply engaged in their embassy. When their people shew respect to their persons, they are to let them know

Digitized by Google

that this is not what they come for, or can be content with; but that they wish them to deal kindly with their Master, whose message they bring, and send them back to him with the joyful news of their repentance and acceptation of Christ: they should passionately endeavour their salvation, and faithfully discharge their commission; that if they will go to hell, they may carry this witness with them, that their destruction is of themselves, and comes not for want of your care and compassion to their souls. It is not enough that you are orthodox preachers, and deliver the truth,—it is zeal that God calls for at your hands. He so strongly himself desires the salvation of poor sinners, that he disdains you should coldly deliver it, without shewing your good-will to it. Christ when he sends his servants to invite guests to his gospel-supper, bids them, 'compel them to come in,' Luke xiv. 23. But how? Surely not as the Spaniards did the Indians, who drove them to be baptized, as we drive cattle to watering, with staves and stones: we are not to drive them in with outward violence, and cruelty practised upon their bodies; but a spiritual force of argument, subduing their hearts by our powerful preaching. When God smites the consciences of men with the terrors of his threatenings, it is to make them willing, not to save them against their will. Fourthly, Let not any person or thing bribe or scare thee from a faithful discharge of thy trust. Ambassadors must not be pensioners to a foreign prince. He is unworthy to serve a prince in so honourable an employment, that dares not trust his master to defend and reward him: such a one will not long be faithful to his trust. Nor will he in the ministry, that rests not contented with God's promise for his protection or reward: O, how soon will he, for fear or favour, seek to save his stake or mend it, though it be by falsifying his trust to God himself! Blessed Paul was far from this baseness, and hath set a noble pattern to all that shall be God's ambassadors to the end of the world: 'As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts; for neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, not a cloak of covetousness; God is witness,' 1 Thess. ii. 4, 5. Fifthly, be kind to, and tenderly careful of, thy fellow-subjects. Were it not strange, if an ambassador sent from hence to Turkey, or Spain, instead of protecting or encouraging the English merchants there in their trade, should hinder their traffic, and employ all the power of his place to their prejudice and damage? Surely his prince sent him not to be an enemy, but a friend and patron to his good subjects there. The minister, as God's ambassador, is to encourage the saints in their heavenly trade, to assist them by his counsel, and to protect them from the scorn that their wicked neighbours cast upon them. O, how sad it is, if he shall bend his ministry against them!—if he shall weaken their hands, and strengthen the hands of the ungodly, in or out of the pulpit, by his preaching or practice! Better he were, with a millstone tied about his neck, thrown into the sea, than thus to offend these little ones. Moses smote the Egyptian, but rescued the Israelite; what account will they make to God of their embassy, who, in the very pulpit, smite the Israelites with their tongues, sneering at them for their purity, and applaud the wicked and profane in their congregations, whereby they bless themselves, as going to heaven, when, God knows, their feet stand in the way that will lead them to hell?

CHAPTER XV.

FIVE THINGS TOUCHED UPON, FROM PAUL'S BEING IN BONDS.

The second argument with which he stirs them up to the remembrance of him in their prayers, in his present afflicted state,—'For which I am an ambassador in bonds:' in the Greek, 'in a chain.' When we hear of an ambassador, and a chain, we might at first expect it to be a chain of gold about his neck, and not a chain of iron about his leg or arm; yet it is the latter which is here meant. Paul was now a prisoner at Rome, but in *libera custodia*, as it is thought by interpreters, from this passage, 'in a chain,' not in chains; it being usual there for a prisoner to be committed to the custody of some soldier, with whom he might walk abroad, having a chain on his right arm, which was tied to his keeper's left arm; such a prisoner it is conceived this

Digitized by Google

holy man was: Paul, the 'lamb,' was prisoner to Nero, the 'lion,' and, therefore, both needed and desired the church's prayers for him. Many observations this short passage affords; I shall lightly touch on them.

SECTION I.—Observe the usage which this blessed apostle finds from an ungrateful world; a chain is put upon him, as if he were some rogue or thief. He preacheth liberty to poor sinners, and is deprived of his own; he proclaims deliverance to the captives, and is used like a slave for his labour. One would wonder what they could find against so holy and innocent a person to accuse him, who made it his daily exercise to live without offence to God and man; yet see what an indictment Tertullus prefers against him, Acts xxiv., as if there had not been such a pestilent fellow in the whole country: and Paul himself tells us, 'he suffered trouble as an evil-doer, even to bonds,' 2 Tim. ii. 9. Many grievous things were laid to his charge. Hence observe, that the best of men may, and often do, suffer under the notion of vile and wicked persons. Let the saints' enemies alone to black their persons and cause. Christ himself must be numbered among transgressors, and no less than blasphemy be laid to his charge. Persecutors think it not enough to be cruel, but they would be thought just while they are cruel. 'Ye have condemned and killed the just,' James v. 6. Here is a horrid murder committed with all the formalities of justice. They condemn first, and then kill. And truly, murder on the bench is worse in God's account, than that which is perpetrated by a villain on the highway. Well, there will be a time when Paul's cause, and the rest of suffering saints, shall have a fairer hearing than they could meet with here, and then it will appear with another complexion. The names of the godly shall have a resurrection as well as their bodies. Now they are buried with their faces downward, their innocency and their sincerity charged with many false imputations; but then all shall be set right. And well may the saints stay to be cleared, as long as God himself stays to vindicate his own government of the world from the hard speeches of ungodly ones.

SECTION II.—Observe the true cause of Paul's sufferings: it was his zeal for God and his truth; 'For which I am in bonds;' that is, for the gospel which I profess and preach: as that martyr, who being asked how he came into prison, shewed his Bible, and said, 'This brought me hither.' Persecutors may pretend what they please, but it is the saint's religion and piety that their spite is at. Paul was an honest man in the opinion of his countrymen, so long as he was of their opinion, went their way, and did as they did; but when he declared himself to be a Christian, and preached the gospel, then they violently opposed him; then his old friends became his bitterest enemies. The wicked are but the devil's slaves, and must do as he will have them. Now, it is truth and godliness that pull down his kingdom; when, therefore, these appear in the saints' lives, then he calls forth the wicked world, as a prince would do his subjects, to fight for him; so that it is impossible to get to heaven without blows; 'He that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution;' and none more than the preacher. He puts his hand into the wasp's nest, and, therefore, must expect to be stung; he treads on the serpent's head, and it were strange if it should not turn again to bite him. But let not this trouble you; fear not what you can suffer, only be careful for what you suffer. Christ's cross is made of sweet wood; there are comforts peculiar to those that suffer for righteousness. When, Sabina, a Christian martyr, fell in travail in the prison, and was heard to cry in her child-bearing, some asked her, how she would endure the torments which her persecutors prepared for her, if she shrunk at those? 'O,' saith she, 'now I suffer for sin, then I shall suffer for Christ.'

SECTION III.—Observe how close Paul sticks to the truth: he will not part with it, though it brings him into trouble; he had rather the persecutor should imprison him for preaching the gospel, than he imprison it by a cowardly silence. He hath cast up his accounts, and is resolved to stand to his profession, whatever it may cost him. The truth is, that religion is not worth embracing, which cannot bear a man up in sufferings for it; and none but the Christian is able to do this. Neither is he worth the name of a Christian, that dares not take Christ's bill of exchange to receive in heaven, for what he suffers for his sake on earth. Yet, alas! how rare is it to have faith enough to do this! It is easier to bow at the name, than to stoop to the cross of Jesus.

Digitized by Google

Many like religion for a summer-house, when all is fair abroad in the world; but when winter comes, the doors are shut up, and there is no one to be seen in or about it.

SECTION IV.—Observe the publication Paul makes of his sufferings to the church: he, being now a prisoner, sends his despatches to this and other churches, to let them know his condition. From whence, observe, that sufferings for the gospel are no matter of shame. Paul doth not blush to tell, it is for the gospel he is in bonds. The shame belonged to them that put on the chain, not to him that wore it The thief, or murderer, may justly blush to tell wherefore he suffers; not the Christian for well-doing. 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on his behalf,' 1 Pet. iv. 16. Christ himself counted it no dishonour to have the print of his wounds seen after his resurrection. The apostles rejoiced that 'they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,' Acts v. 41. And if it be no shame to suffer for the gospel, then surely it is none to profess it, and live up to its holy rules. Shall the wicked glory in their shame, and thou be ashamed of thy glory? Shall they do the devil's work at noon-day, and thou afraid to be seen to be good?

SECTION V.—Observe the end why Paul makes known his sufferings. First, That they may know the true cause wherefore he suffered. His enemies laid heavy things to his charge, and these might fly as far as Ephesus. When the saints are in a suffering condition, Satan is very industrious to defame them, and misrepresent the cause of their troubles to the world, as if it were for no good. Now, though Paul regarded little what the wicked world said of him, yet he desired to stand right in the thoughts of the churches, and therefore acquaints them with the cause of his imprisonment. Secondly, To strengthen their faith and comfort their hearts. No doubt but Paul's chain entered into their souls, and his suffering was their sorrow. This he knew, and therefore sends them word by Tychicus, the bearer of this epistle, how it fared with him in his bonds, that they might not spend too many tears for him, who had a heart so merry and cheerful in his sufferings, ver. 22: 'That ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.' Thus have we seen sometimes a tender-hearted father on his sick bed, not so much troubled with his own pains, or thoughts of his approaching death, as to see his children take them so much to heart; and, therefore, forgetting his own miseries, addresseth himself with a smiling countenance to comfort them. O, it is an excellent sight to behold the saints that are at liberty mourning over their afflicted brethren, and those that are the sufferers become comforters to them that are at liberty! Never doth religion appear more glorious, than when they commend it who are suffering for it; and no way can they commend it higher, than by a holy, humble cheerfulness of spirit in their sufferings. The comfortable letters which the martyrs in Queen Mary's days sent out of prison, did wonderfully strengthen their brethren throughout the kingdom, and fit them for the prison. Sufferers preach with great advantage above others. They do not speak by hearsay; but what they experience in themselves. Thirdly, To engage their prayers for him. Suffering saints have ever been very covetous of prayers: Paul sets all the churches at work for him. 'Pray, pray, pray,' was the usual close to Mr. Bradford's letters out of prison: and there is great reason for it; for a suffering condition is full of temptations. When man plays the persecutor, the devil forgets not to be a tempter. He that followed Christ into the wilderness, will find a way to get to his saints in the prison. Sometimes he will try whether he can soften them for impressions of fear, or make them pity themselves; and he shall not want them that will lend their tears to melt their courage, and weaken their resolution; may be, wife and children, or friends and neighbours, who wish them well, but are abused by Satan to lay a snare before them, while they express their affection to them. No doubt, those good people meant well to Paul, who with tears and entreaties endeavoured to keep him from Jerusalem (where it was foretold he should come into trouble); but Satan had a design against Paul therein, who hoped they might not only break his heart, but weaken his courage with their tears. When Satan cannot make a coward of the saint, to run from the cross, then he will try to sour and swell his spirit with some secret anger against those that laid it on. O, it is no easy matter to

Digitized by Google

receive evil, and wish none to him from whose hands we have it. To reserve love for him that shews wrath and hatred to us, is a glorious, but a difficult work. If the devil cannot leaven the saint with wrath against his persecutor, then he will try to blow him up with a high conceit of himself, who dares suffer for Christ, while others shrink from it, and seek to keep themselves safe within their own shell. O, this pride is a salamander, that can live in the fire of suffering! If any one saint needs the humility of many saints, it is he that is called to suffer: to glory in his sufferings for Christ becomes him well, 2 Cor. xii. 9; Gal. vi. 14; but to glory in himself for them, is hateful: he needs a quick eye and steady hand, that has to drive his chariot on the brow of so dangerous a precipice.

In a word,—As a suffering condition is full of temptations, so the saint's strength to carry him safely through is not in his own keeping. God must help, or the stoutest champion's spirit will soon fail: 'In all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,' Phil. iv. 12. This was a hard lesson indeed to learn: who was his master? See ver. 13, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' Now, as the saints' strength to suffer is not in themselves, but in Christ; so prayer is the best means to fetch it in for their help; for by it they confess their own weakness, and so God is secured from having a rival in the praise; which Paul is here free to do, and more than that, for as he confesseth he can do nothing without Christ's strength to enable him, so he dares not rely on his own prayers for obtaining it, but calls in the auxiliary forces of his fellow-saints to besiege heaven for him; that while he is in the valley, suffering for the gospel, they may be lifting up their hands and hearts in the mount of prayer for him.

THE END.

ABERDEEN: PRINTED BY ARTHUR KING & CO., BROAD STREET.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google